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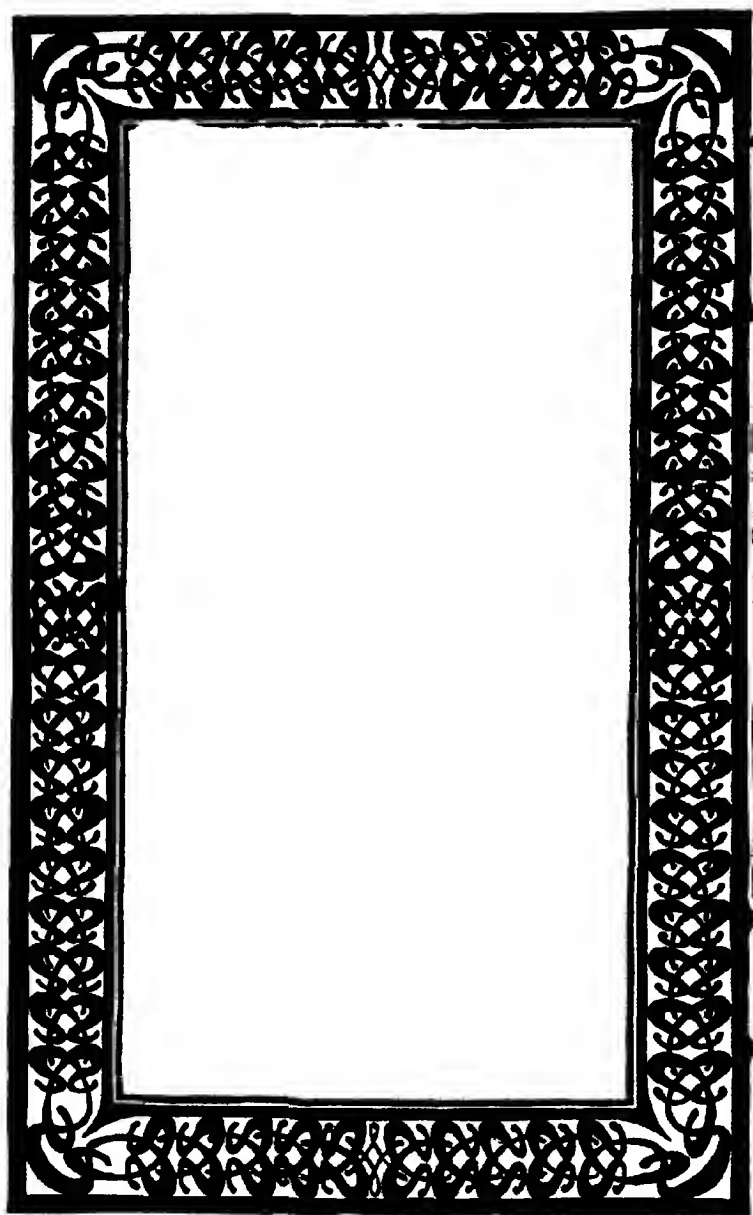
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Literature of Italy

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*"IT IS I," SHE SAID, HOLDING A LARGE BUNCH OF
ROSES AGAINST HER BREAST*

From an Original Drawing by Arthur Crisp

THE CONQUEST OF ROME

(LA CONQUISTA DI ROMA)

BY

MATILDE SERAO

TRANSLATED BY DORA KNOWLTON RANOUS

THE NATIONAL ALUMNI

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	IX
CHAPTER I—One Road to Rome	I
CHAPTER II—The Goal of Ambition	14
CHAPTER III—For King and Country	27
CHAPTER IV—Mysteries of Rome	42
CHAPTER V—A Roman Christmas	59
CHAPTER VI—Sangiorgio Begins the Conflict	79
CHAPTER VII—The Knight Meets a Siren	89
CHAPTER VIII—The Adventure of the Masked Ball	101
CHAPTER IX—A Lady and a Challenge	121
CHAPTER X—Another Step toward Conquest	139
CHAPTER XI—An Essay in Diplomacy	163
CHAPTER XII—The Only Woman	174
CHAPTER XIII—Angelica Discusses Politics	189
CHAPTER XIV—The Quirinal Ball	196
CHAPTER XV—The Roman Carnival	213
CHAPTER XVI—A Flower on the Current	224
CHAPTER XVII—Love's Sanctuary	231
CHAPTER XVIII—"The Pangs of Despised Love"	257
CHAPTER XIX—Rome, the Conqueror	270
An Innocent Barabbas	281

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ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"It is I," she said, holding a large bunch of roses against her breast—(Page 128)	Frontispiece
The seconds threw themselves between the combatants, and the surgeons ran toward them	156
She turned and looked deep into Sangiorgio's eyes, wherein she read the truth	269

INTRODUCTION

MATILDE SERAO, one of the most popular novelists of the Italy of to-day, was born in Patras, Greece, March 7, 1856. Her mother was descended from an ancient Greek family of royal blood, and her father was an exile from Naples, to which place he returned with his family when his daughter was about twelve years old. The mother superintended the education of the young girl, who early showed a disposition to view life through the lenses of romantic imagination. At the age of seventeen she published a story entitled *Opalo* ("Opal"), which attracted considerable attention, and the editor of *Il Piccolo* invited her to join his staff of newspaper reporters. She accepted the offer, and it is said that, in her zeal to accomplish the same kind of work as that done by the male reporters, she cut her hair short and assumed man's attire. This work did not last long, however, and soon she was writing vivid and sympathetic short stories of Neapolitan life, portraying the joys, sorrows, passions, and superstitions of the volatile people of that city with bold strokes that presented in a few pages little masterpieces of description. Her first long novel was called *A Fickle Heart*, and later she wrote a story of the morbid emotional life of an invalid, entitled *Fantasia*.

Matilde Serao married Eduardo Scarfoglio, and established with him in Rome a journal called *La Corriere*

di Roma, later the place of this publication was changed to Naples and it was called *La Corriere di Napoli*. They published also another journal, known as *Il Mattino*.

Matilde Serao's best known novels are *Riccardo Joanna*, a story of journalistic life; *Il Paese di Cuccagna* ("The Land of Cockaigne"); *La Ballerina* ("The Ballet-Dancer"); *Suor Giovanna della Croce* ("Sister Joanna of the Cross," a Sicilian story); and *La Conquista di Roma* ("The Conquest of Rome"). In the last mentioned work are found all this many-sided writer's literary gifts: a sculpturesque distinction in the drawing of character, human sympathy, startling realism, producing a picture of high life and political intrigue in Roman society of to-day, which enables the reader to see that world with the same completeness of vision with which the author sees it herself.

D. K. R.

CHAPTER I

ONE ROAD TO ROME

THE train stopped.
"Capua! Capua!" rang a cry through the darkness.

A group of officers strolled along the platform, jesting and laughing, having come there to seek amusement in seeing the night train from Naples pass on its way to Rome. The guard talked in low tones to the station-master, who gave him a commission for Caiannello, while a mail-carrier handed up a pouch full of letters to the clerk in the mail-coach.

The officers chatted gayly among themselves, with a great jingling of spurs, and looked with interest at the travelers coming and going, trying to discern among them a pretty woman, or some familiar face. But the doors of most of the coaches were shut, and the light from the lamps within was barely visible through the closed windows. Here and there an open door revealed glimpses of sleeping travelers wrapped in heavy coats, rugs, or shawls.

"Everyone is asleep," said one of the officers; "let us go home and to bed."

"Here are a bride and groom, I'll wager," said another, seeing the word *Reserved* over a door. And, as the shades were not drawn down, the young man, full of

curiosity, sprang upon the step and glanced in at the window. But he jumped down again immediately, shrugging his shoulders.

"Only a man—alone! he said. "Probably some deputy. He is asleep too."

But the man "alone" was not sleeping. He lay at full length on the cushions; his eyes were closed; one arm supported his neck, and the other hand was thrust within his coat. But his face had not the peaceful expression of repose, as the features were contracted in thought.

After the train had begun to move again, and had passed out into the open country, the traveler opened his eyes and changed his position. Occasionally a thatched cottage, a little village, or a switch-tender's little hut flashed out against a dark background; while a path of fire was projected into the darkness, coming from the headlight of the locomotive, which appeared to throw a circle of dancing flames before it as it rushed along at full speed.

The cold prevented the solitary traveler from sleeping. He was accustomed to the mild nights of the South, and had set out upon his journey with only a light top-coat, his sole luggage being a small bag and a modest trunk. But neither clothes, linen, nor books were of importance to him; nothing was important but that little gold medal—a precious fetich!—attached to his watch-chain. It had been obtained for him through special favor, by the questor of the Chamber, and from the day that it had become his own, his fingers were continually

touching it with almost mechanical caresses. Sometimes he clutched it so hard that it left an abrasion on the skin. In order to have this compartment reserved for him, he had shown the medal to the station-master, lowering his eyes and compressing his lips to hide a look of triumph and a smile of satisfaction. He had held it in his hand since the beginning of the journey, as if he feared to lose it, and it was warm from the contact with his feverish palm. The sensation of pleasure he derived from that contact was strangely acute; he fingered delicately the carving of the metal, and felt beneath his touch the idolized inscription: *XIVe Legislatura*. On the reverse were his surname and his Christian name: *Francesco Sangiorgio*.

His hands burned feverishly, but he shivered with cold. He rose and looked out of the door. The train was still running through open country. The wheels rolled smoothly along the rails, without disturbing the travelers' sleep. The great moving caravansary filled with sleepers sped through the night as if driven by an implacable, ardent will, carrying with it other wills, passive in repose.

"Let us try to sleep," thought the Honorable Sangiorgio.

Lying down once more, he attempted to do so. But the name of Sparanise, called two or three times at a station, reminded him of the little hamlet in the Basilicata whence he had come, which place, together with twenty other humble villages, had elected him deputy. This little hamlet, a few hours' distance from a small

station on the Eboli-Reggio line, now seemed very remote to the Honorable Sangiorgio—far away in a marshy valley, where a noxious fog now rose from the streams whose dry beds in summer show only yellow stones.

On his way to the station from that lonely spot in the Basilicata, he had passed near the cemetery, a large, square tract of land, where black crosses were scattered among the tall pine-trees. Under one of these lay his former opponent, the patriotic old deputy who had been reëlected year after year, but whom he had fought with the audacity of youth, ignoring all obstacles. He never would have defeated him had not Death, a powerful ally, given him an easy victory. He had triumphed while rendering homage to the civic virtues of the departed patriot; but when passing the cemetery he felt no pity for the tired old warrior who had descended to the sublime serenity of the tomb. All this was forgotten in the face of his unlooked-for success, as well as the ten years of his life as a country lawyer, dealing with the petty affairs of provincial courts—litigation over an inheritance of three hundred *lire* or a blow with a bill-hook; ten years passed amid sordid and paltry affairs, on the alert against the lies and tricks of rascally peasants and clients that tried to cheat him, while he looked upon them all as his unarmed enemies.

Among such surroundings the young man had felt humiliated and discouraged. He defended only half-heartedly his petty cases before judges who listened to him with evident *ennui*; and at last he fell into the habit of hastening through his defence in a few brief and indiffer-

ent words, so that he was considered a very poor advocate.

He had gone from his father's home without regret, although he left behind both parents, who had wept at his departure with the pathetic selfishness of age. This hardness of heart was the result of long-suppressed anger and revolt. Now he recalled these past years distinctly, but without emotion, like a disinterested spectator, as he lay stretched upon the cushions of his coach. He closed his eyes, but could not sleep.

In the other coaches, however, the travelers appeared to be plunged in profound sleep.

At Mont-Cassin, where they stopped five minutes at one o'clock in the morning, no one left the train. The waiter in the restaurant snored under a smoky lamp, with his head upon his folded arms resting on the marble table. The trainmen, wrapped in black capes, with hoods pulled low over their eyes and carrying lanterns in their hands, passed alongside the train, testing the wheels, which resounded to the blows with a tone as clear as that of a crystal bell. The hissing of the locomotive seemed less strident, as if it lowered its sharp tone in deference to the sleeping travelers.

Leaving this station, the train moved more slowly, without jolts or jars, gliding along with a monotonous rumble, like the snoring of a giant. Francesco Sangiorgio thought of all the unknown persons that were his fellow-travelers: some saddened by their recent departure, others glad to be approaching a new place; men, loving or indifferent, or preoccupied with business;

some enfeebled by age and illness, others in the fullness of youth and vivacity; many who were hastening toward a tragedy, others toward perfect happiness—men and women, gay, sad, poor, rich, unhappy. Yet all, one after another, had yielded to sleep within half an hour. Sleep had calmed their ardor, soothed their sadness, quieted their desires. Irritated nerves, anger, scorn, melancholy, suffering, jealousy, hatred or love—all human weaknesses and passions were submerged in the forgetfulness of sleep.

"But why am I still awake?" thought Sangiorgio.

He arose and stood erect under the flickering light of the little lamp, and peered through the misty window at the flying landscape. He felt a keen sense of loneliness, as if he were abandoned and lost in a vast unknown world. He regretted having demanded a reserved compartment, and yearned for human companionship. He felt as dismayed as a child, shut up in that prison from which he could not escape. An unreasoning terror seized upon him, and he fell back upon the seat for a moment, when a new thought distracted him from his nervous fear.

"Rome! Yes, it is Rome!" he murmured.

It was Rome, indeed. The four letters forming that word now rang in the ears of his imagination—round, clear, and resonant as the bugles of a marching army—with the persistency of a fixed idea. The name was short and sweet, like one of those adorable names of women that in themselves possess a secret charm, and it had for him an almost magic seduction. He could

not figure to himself that it was merely the name of a city—an agglomeration of people and of houses. Rome was to him the great unknown. Having always lacked both the time and the money necessary to make the journey, he never had been able to visit the great city and had formed only an abstract idea of it—thinking of it as of something vast and fluctuating—as a great thought, an ideal apparition, an immense face with indistinct contour. Thus his idea of Rome was grand, but undecided and indefinite—strange comparisons, fictions, singular visions, fanciful conceits crowded one another in his dreamy imagination. Under the mask of indifference habitually worn by this pensive son of the South, was concealed a fiery imagination long accustomed to solitary musing. And the idea of Rome added fresh fuel to his burning thoughts.

Ah, how he loved Rome! He thought of it as a colossal human shadow extending maternal arms to clasp him in a mighty embrace, whence he should emerge, strengthened and rejuvenated. He fancied he could hear echoing through the night the irresistible sweetness of a woman's voice calling his name, and a voluptuous thrill stirred his whole being. Rome awaited him, as a mother waits for her son returning to her after a long absence.

For a long time he had been consumed with impatience to fly to Rome, but had been restrained by moral and material obstacles. He could not free himself, and suffered mental torment that rendered his face pale and his eyes dim. How many times, from the terrace of his little house, had he gazed across the hills,

thinking that there—far away over there!—under the blue arch of the horizon, Rome was calling to him! Sadly he thought of the distance that separated him from the city of his love, and bitterly he hated everything that prevented him from answering her call.

Those ten years full of sordid and maddening struggle had changed him: his mind was filled with suspicion of all men and exaggerated self-esteem; he dissimulated his real sentiments and felt unbounded scorn for every human desire except ambition. He believed himself invincible, but sometimes, in dark hours of defeat, he felt himself overwhelmed with a sense of weakness. Then his pride was overcome by humiliation, and he regarded himself as only a poor weak creature, unworthy of Rome, the well beloved! Ah, he must curb himself, he must be patient, prove his strength through adversity and purify his soul, in order to be worthy of her! Sacred as a priestess, a mother, or a lover, Rome demanded expiations and sacrifices; she must have a pure heart and a will of iron.

"Ceprano! Ceprano! Fifteen minutes' wait!" cried the guard.

The Honorable Sangiorgio gazed around, bewildered; he had been in a fevered dream.

First a ray of pale green showed at the horizon; then a livid light, which mounted slowly in the dark sky. In the coldness of the waning night, the vast Roman Campagna opened to the view. Sangiorgio regarded it curiously. It appeared a wide plain, indistinct in color, with irregularities like the undulations of a petrified sea.

In the dim light of dawn it looked like an enormous desert, with its monotony broken here and there by a bush, a shrub, or a hedge.

The stations became more frequent, wet and shining with the dew, their windows closed behind rusty green blinds. The water dripped from the laurel bushes, and at each station was a large clock with a white face, which, with its long black hands, looked like an enormous two-legged spider. The station-master, muffled in his cloak, with head bent low, tramped to and fro among the employés. In the fresh morning air an acrid, penetrating odor of damp earth mounted to the brain. A large town, built on a hill, surrounded by battlements and flanked by two towers, rose gray and ancient, a relic of the Middle Ages. This was Velletri.

The train went more slowly; voices were heard from the next coach; at a window appeared the dark, close-shaven face of a Spanish priest, who was smoking a cigar. Now the broad daylight illuminated the whole sky, showing the nakedness of the country in all its grandeur. A short, sparse, marshy grass covered the plain now bathed in the clear light of morning; here and there were large yellowish-brown spots of dry and arid land. It was indeed a desert, vast, complete, without a tree or the shadow of a human being, or even the flight of a bird; it was desolation itself—immense, solemn, superb.

In contemplating this country, which was unlike any other, Francesco Sangiorgio felt a profound astonishment, in which were swept away all his former imagin-

ings. He remained curled up in his corner, mute and motionless, trembling with cold and excitement. At last a weight seemed to descend upon his eyelids, his limbs relaxed, and he realized that his sleepless night had left him greatly fatigued. He would have liked to lie down again at full length upon the cushion, and have a nap in the sunshine, and envied those passengers that had been able to sleep during the night journey.

By this time the hours seemed interminable, and the sight of the desolate country oppressed him. He was longing for sleep; his mouth was dry and bitter, as if he were recovering from illness; his impatience increased to such a degree that he actually suffered. The local passenger trains were too slow—why had he not taken an express? The rapidly approaching realization of his dreams gave him a throb of joy, yet the consciousness that he was so near Rome filled him with a vague, inexplicable fear. He strove in vain to be calm, to laugh at his own perturbation, but the last twenty minutes were almost insupportable.

With his head out of the window, the smoke from the engine blowing in his face, and without noticing the fine aqueducts that traversed the plain, he gazed ahead toward the longed-for goal, thinking each instant that he could see the beloved city. The Campagna seemed to fly past him into the background, carrying with it the wet fields, the yellow aqueducts, and the little white huts of the switch-tenders. The locomotive seemed to augment its speed, and from time to time emitted a prolonged and piercing whistle.

Where were they? Nothing could be seen. When at last the movement of the train began to slacken, Sangiorgio's excitement was so overpowering that he sank back upon the cushions, unnerved for the moment. He stepped down from his compartment, with trembling limbs and throbbing heart.

The crowd surrounded him, pushed and jostled him, without paying him any attention. Two trains had just arrived, one from Florence, the other from Naples, and the travelers filled the station platform with noise and bustle.

The Honorable Sangiorgio stood bewildered in the midst of this hubbub; he leaned against a wall, his handbag at his feet, and gazed at the throng as if he sought a familiar face.

The station was damp and dark, and was filled with boxes, trunks, and packages. The travelers hurried along with tired, bored, and sleepy faces, yawning frankly; the prevailing expression was of absolute, invincible indifference to all things.

These people, as well as the employés and the expressmen, went and came without noticing Sangiorgio, who, with a childish impulse, had unbuttoned his topcoat with the sole idea of displaying his medal. Twice he had called a porter, who had disappeared without listening to him.

A group of railway employés had gathered around several gentlemen, of bureaucratic appearance, in black coats and white cravats, with their coat-collars turned up to hide the pallor resulting from broken sleep. They

lifted their hats with great respect as a slender and elegant woman alighted from the train from Florence, followed by a tall and thin old gentleman.

The group approached them with much solemnity, as if to join in some high social ceremony; one of the gentlemen offered a cluster of rare flowers to the young lady, and all bowed low to her elderly companion. Within the now half-opened topcoats could be seen a dazzling array of snowy shirt-fronts, several gold medals shone from their owners' watch-chains, and animated smiles were on every face.

"His Excellency the Minister!" murmured some one in the throng.

Then the group broke up, the lady moved away, leaning on the arm of the thin old man, followed by the deputies and the other functionaries. The Honorable Sangiorgio walked behind them mechanically.

When the official party reached the Piazza Margherita, they all got into carriages, the lady putting her hand out of the window and smiling once more upon her gallant escorts. Sangiorgio remained alone in the square. The pavement was wet, as if from recent rain.

All the windows of the Albergo Continentale were closed. At the left, the Corso Margherita was still in the process of building, covered with beams, stones, and rubbish. The omnibuses from the hotels set off, but several *fiacres* remained standing, through the indolence of their drivers, who smoked and awaited a "fare."

At the right was a closed variety theater, and on a high stone wall was a flaring poster of the *Popolo Romano*.

Over all hung a thick, heavy and penetrating mist, permeated by some unpleasant odor. The city, in the damp dreariness of an autumn morning, seemed to give forth a disagreeable emanation, like the feverish breath of a sick person.

The Honorable Francesco Sangiorgio was very pale, and felt a chill—in his heart!

CHAPTER II

THE GOAL OF AMBITION

HE had told himself that on that day he must resist the temptation to go to the Parliament House. The rain had ceased; a slight vapor still hung in the air; the streets were muddy, and the sky remained overcast.

From a window of the Albergo di Milano the Honorable Sangiorgio contemplated the Parliament House, painted a pale yellow, and tried to strengthen himself in his resolution not to visit it that day. During the first week after his arrival he had passed all his time there—mornings, afternoons, and evenings. In the early morning his first glance, on awaking, was directed toward the great structure. He dressed mechanically, his eyes still fixed upon it, while he planned to see more of the city, to seek a permanent lodging, as this hotel life could not last. But when he set out from the hotel, opening his umbrella, he felt a sudden seizure of indolence; the sloping street leading to the Piazza Colonna looked slippery and dangerous, he shrugged his shoulders and made straight for Montecitorio. He would remain there until it was time to return to his hotel for breakfast, in a dining-room on the ground floor, where his favorite seat was one that faced the great plate-glass doors. Seated here, he would order veal, cooked in the Roman style,

and while eating he could scrutinize everyone that entered or left the palace.

He ate rapidly, with the absent-minded air of one not keenly alive to the pleasures of the table. His eyes were continually fixed upon the entrance of the palace; sometimes he fancied he recognized Sella, with his stout person, somewhat square and wooden in outline, as if he had been carved with a hatchet, and his black beard just touched with gray.

Again, he imagined he saw Crispi, with his heavy white moustache and his ruddy face, looking like a military *bourgeois*. Sangiorgio finished his meal in haste, burning with impatience to obtain a close view of these great statesmen, these leaders among men—and again he hurried to Montecitorio. But there a profound disillusion awaited him.

He sought in vain for Sella and Crispi; the Chamber looked cold and blank under the white light from the dome; the benches were covered with white linen, and the floor with a gray carpet bordered with blue. He mounted abstractedly the five steps leading to the chair of the presiding officer, and paused there for a moment, looking at the rows of benches, which grew wider as they rose toward the galleries.

He felt a boyish impulse to push the buttons of all the electric bells, and in order not to yield to it, he immediately left the Chamber by another doorway, carrying with him a melancholy impression of that great empty cone-like space, bathed in pale yellow light.

He did not find Sella and Crispi anywhere, either in

the dark circular gallery, which looks like the portico of a crypt, or in the other corridor, long and narrow, where the deputies store away their reports and bills under lock and key. Neither did he find them in the buffet, the hall called the Lost Footsteps, nor in the offices: all was silence and solitude, except for a group of ushers in uniform, without medals, who strolled about with the bored air of idlers.

Occasionally Sangiorgio met the questor of the Chamber, who had come to take the place of the other questor, a nobleman who had gone to pass the month of October in his villa on Lago Maggiore; this questor, a baron of the Abruzzi, was a very great lord, and, with his courteous and polished manners, he observed everything closely, like a man of honor faithful to his trust. Whenever he encountered Sangiorgio he gave him a slight but courteous salutation, and passed on. This reserved politeness intimidated the young deputy, who blushed at each encounter as if he had committed some error.

At last he took refuge in the reading-room, near the oval table, where lay scattered the daily journals. In this apartment he always found two deputies: one a socialist from Romagna, with a chestnut beard and flashing eyes behind a pair of spectacles, who wrote at a small table, dashing off letters, proclamations, and pamphlets; the other was an old statesman, with rosy face and white beard, who slept tranquilly in an arm-chair, with his feet on another chair, his hands in his pockets, and a newspaper spread over him.

The socialist raised his head and examined Sangiorgio, perhaps trying to ascertain whether this newcomer had within him the stuff whereof disciples are made; but the cold glance, the obstinate brow beneath the bushy black hair, the whole energetic physiognomy of the young man indicated a character already formed, and little likely to be swayed by any man's influence. Lamena, the socialist, bent again over his writing.

Sangiorgio paused only for a moment in the reading-room on his way to the library on the third floor. Here several clerks were seated at high wooden desks, engaged in compiling a general catalogue, and working in perfect silence.

A bald-headed, red-nosed deputy stood before a desk, turning over and over the leaves of a catalogue, as if he were searching for an undiscoverable work. He was very short, and stood on a footstool in order to reach the desk, and with his nearsighted eyes he tried to read with his nose so close to the book that it looked as if he were about to flatten that organ upon the page like a seal.

No one else was to be found in the adjoining rooms, which were filled with books, and tables covered with pens, paper, inkstands and pencils for the use of literary workers.

In one corner, before a half-empty shelf, the librarian rummaged furiously among some books. He had a passion for this library, which he had created and had kept in order. He did not turn his head on hearing Sangiorgio's footsteps, or if he did it was only to throw

him a rapid glance from his piercing eyes, overshadowed by heavy black brows—a glance still absorbed by his literary researches.

Francesco Sangiorgio, again embarrassed by that surprised scrutiny, retreated to the farthest room, selected a book at random and began to read.

Like a lover who cannot make up his mind to leave his innamorata, and seeks a thousand pretexts to remain beside her, so Sangiorgio again found himself strolling through the corridors, pausing to look at the maps hanging on the walls; he looked again in the Chamber, at the allotment of seats; he glanced over the journals in the reading-room, or turned the leaves of some book in the library.

With the natural rusticity of his mind, and his provincial timidity, he feared lest the questor, the librarian, the ushers, and the occasional deputies, might regard him as he really was: a provincial, a novice, dazzled by his first political success, who trembled with joy at finding himself in the parliamentary armchairs, and who could not tear himself away from the fascination of the place. Again, like a lover, he imagined that everyone could read in his face the secret of his passion.

But that day he had resolved that he would not set foot in Montecitorio; he would not even think of the parliamentary world. He temporized, lingering near the window, and finally resolved to see something of Rome after he had had his breakfast.

He had been awakened early by an unusual commotion in the next room. A loud, sonorous, virile voice, with a

strong Neapolitan accent, was audible at sunrise, talking, laughing, singing, its owner apparently receiving visitors—friends, acquaintances, and petitioners who made requests, recommended themselves, and set forth their claims in Neapolitan *patois*, with a persistency to which the Honorable Bulgaro, Deputy for Chiaia, the second Naples district, opposed energetic reprisals. Everything could be heard through the thin partition, and Sangiorgio listened involuntarily.

—No, he could not, no! said the Honorable Bulgaro. —He was not the Eternal Father, to dispense favors to everybody. Let everyone go away and leave him in peace! And he strode to and fro with the heavy tread of a large man, grown indolent in a *bourgeois* life, after losing the elasticity of a handsome and vigorous young officer, once a breaker of tender hearts.

But his petitioners insisted, supplicated, explained their troubles, told their stories over and over until the Honorable Bulgaro, with the easy Neapolitan good nature, finished the interview by yielding, saying:

“Very well! Very well! We will see whether we cannot do something.”

His visitors departed as satisfied as if they had already attained the object of their desires, and the great man remained alone for a moment, puffing, panting, and swearing:

“Good Lord! What a racket! What an infernal din!”

The Honorable Sangiorgio felt ashamed at having listened so long, and he went down to breakfast in a

very pensive mood. He armed himself with courage to resist the seductions of the Chamber; many deputies must have arrived by this time, since it was barely three weeks before the opening of the Fourteenth Legislature. He was conscious of a weakening of his resolve, but at that moment a carriage rolling slowly over the wet pavement obstructed for an instant his view of the grand entrance to the palace. He ran out, stopped the carriage with a resolute gesture, and jumped in.

"Where to, Signor?" asked the coachman of this absent-minded patron, who had given him no address.

"To—Saint Peter's—yes, Saint Peter's," Sangiorgio replied.

The driver took a long time, because the streets leading to St. Peter's were thronged with pedestrians and vehicles; besides, they were narrow and winding, lined with dark and dirty little shops of second-hand dealers in iron and papers, and broken by numerous blind alleys. At the Castle St. Angelo there was an open space where one could breathe, but along the banks of the turbid and almost stagnant Tiber was a succession of little brown huts, buildings pierced by innumerable small windows, showing damp, unwholesome-looking stains, the mildewed foundations of which were revealed by the low water. The stream at this point was very repellent.

In the Via Borgo the influence of the religious atmosphere was discernible, among the somber palaces, the shops for the sale of sacred objects—statuettes, images, rosaries, crucifixes—which bore the pompous sign: *Objects of Art*

In the great square, now silent and deserted, played two fountains, tossing their plume-like white spray; and the obelisk stood up tall and straight like a giant's staff. The carriage passed these and drew up before the grand stairway.

"Do you wish to go into the church?" asked the coachman.

"Yes," the deputy replied, shaking himself out of his absent-mindedness.

When he reached the peristyle, he turned and surveyed the square. He had read that at that distance a man looked no larger than an ant; but no one was in sight, and the vast, empty, watery square appeared to Sangiorgio as dreary as the Roman Campagna.

Within the church, he experienced no mystic impressions; he was indifferent to the subject of religion, never spoke of it, discussed the Pope only as a factor in politics, and left religious faith and ceremonies to the women. He was only slightly impressed with the architecture of Saint Peter's.

A group of Germans moved about the great church, regarding with disapproval so much Christian pomp. Not a chair, not a bench, not a priest nor a sacristan could be seen. Silent and deserted were the brown confessionals, on which, in gold letters, were the words: *Pro hispanica lingua, Pro gallica lingua, Pro germanica lingua*. If one wished to kneel, he must do so upon the steps of the pulpit, upon those of the main altar, or upon the cold pavement.

Francesco Sangiorgio knew nothing about the tombs

of the Popes, and his ideas of art were exceedingly vague. The monument by Canova, with its sleeping lions, did not impress him; that by Jean de la Rovère, of bronze, he pronounced admirable; but before the monument by Bernini, with its skeleton of gold, its white marble pope and red marble draperies, he felt only a sensation of profound astonishment.

He strolled about here and there, his mind dwelling on outside matters, not in the least interested in that stupendous mass of stone, freezing and lonely, where nothing moved except shadows. Presently he left the church.

"To the Coliseum!" he said resolutely to the coachman.

This worthy, in order to prolong the drive, passed through the ancient quarters inhabited by the true Roman population, reluctant to abandon their old streets and wretched dwellings swarming with vermin.

Sangiorgio affected to admire the Forum Trajani, that extensive space below the level of the ground, with its forest of broken columns, which furnish a sort of cemetery for dead cats, and a rendezvous for various kinds of animals, to which the servants of the neighborhood generously bring the remains of their dinners. He did not see the roughened façade of the Capitol, nor the Arch of Septimius Severus, the Temple of Peace, nor the great Roman Forum, because of the demolition that was going on there.

The coachman took a short cut and stopped before the Coliseum.

The deputy felt that he ought to get out of the carriage, so he descended, and passed under a high arch, feeling his shoes sink into the muddy ground.

A stagnant pool, bordered by grass, was near the arch, and the rain had left smaller pools among the stones scattered here and there, in the time-worn hollows of the steps, and even in the hand of a broken statue.

Francesco, astonished at the immensity of these walls, sought to get his bearings: where, then, was the imperial box, the gallery of the vestals, and the gallery of the priests? He walked slowly along to the middle of the amphitheater, and looked around.

Yes, certainly, the Coliseum was majestic, but the dull light hid part of its grandeur and showed only the decay of antiquity. At a distance the country looked green, with a damp and marshy verdure, and no song of bird, cry of animal, or voice of man could be heard.

The visitor walked conscientiously along the circular gallery, speculating as to the probable appearance of this great ruin by moonlight. By daylight it appeared to him only a vast and useless thing, the work of a proud and powerful people.

A gentleman and a lady—she, slender and elegant; he, tall and strong—were also promenading in the vast subterranean corridor; they walked slowly, without looking at each other, but with clasped hands and speaking in low tones. The lady lowered her eyes on meeting those of Sangiorgio, and the man glanced at him with an expression of annoyance.

"I dreamed of the Coliseum at midnight, under the

rays of the moon," said the deputy to himself. "It appears that the old Romans built it only for a rendezvous for modern lovers!"

He shrugged his shoulders with a secret sneer at the idea of love; the disdain of the provincial who has always lacked time, opportunity, and inclination to love; the scorn of the man wholly absorbed in ambitious dreams.

"Shall we go now to the Church of San Giovanni, Signor?" inquired the coachman, obsequiously.

"Yes, let us go."

They drove first to San Giovanni, then to Santa Maria Maggiore. Sangiorgio did not at all comprehend the delicate mysticism of these churches, and he gazed about him abstractedly.

When he left them, the coachman, without asking for instructions, drove under the Arch of Titus and took him to the Baths of Caracalla. The deputy stopped under the gateway to examine the photographs for sale there; then he entered quickly, as if seized with a sudden impatience.

The walls were very high, and were covered with moss and brambles; in the middle of the vast compartments the earth had become depressed into a hollow, which was filled with brackish water.

At one end of the hall for sports and games was the statue of a woman, modestly draped—a Hygeia, without doubt. A section of broken wall stood out against the sad November sky, like a giant rock towering up in the gray twilight. At a distance, on the verdant plain, was a

round and delicate temple, which perhaps was dedicated to Venus.

The Honorable Sangiorgio felt ill at ease in that colossal edifice; a chill stole over him; he felt small and petty in the face of this formidable grandeur, which humiliated him and made him suffer.

"No," he said resolutely to the coachman, who offered to show him the Appian Way, "No, let us go back to the city."

On the way back he felt himself shivering. Night was coming on, and he fancied that he bore upon his own shoulders all the dampness and humidity of that moist autumn day; his soul seemed saturated with the invincible melancholy of these ruins, the emptiness of these solitary churches, the insensibility of those great stone saints and abandoned altars of precious marbles.

All these dead things, buried under the dust of centuries, mattered nothing to him. Who cared for the past? He belonged to his own day; he loved the present, he loved life, and the struggle for a future. Why stop to indulge in vain regrets over the decadence of modern times? Was not the present age great also, with its wonderful discoveries and advanced civilization?

The first glimpse of the twinkling gaslight on the Piazza Sciarra aroused him from his melancholy. A newsboy was crying the *Fanfulla* and the *Bersagliere*.

The sidewalks were thronged with people. Sangiorgio felt his spirits revive. A man stood in the middle of a group and was announcing that the opening of the Legislature was fixed for the twentieth of November.

The cafés were brightly lighted, and Sangiorgio thought he recognized, through the windows of the Colonna Restaurant, the Honorable Zanardelli, whose portrait he had seen. He entered and seated himself at a small table not far from the deputy from Brescia.

While eating, he noted the tall frame, the small obstinate head, nervous gestures, and Southern loquacity of this man. In another corner more deputies were dining, and the waiters hovered over these well-known persons, ignoring the lonely and solitary Sangiorgio.

In this surcharged atmosphere, he resolved to gather all his energies for the imminent conflict; and when later he returned to his hotel and gazed again upon the Montecitorio Palace, his whole being thrilled at the sight of that great building wrapped in the shadows of night. His heart was there!

CHAPTER III

FOR KING AND COUNTRY

THE glove shop in the Via di Pietra was full of activity. The proprietor, a smiling, blond Milanese, assisted by two young women, did nothing but take down boxes of gloves from the shelves and put them back again, in response to the demands of fresh customers. These, buttoned up in tight-fitting topcoats, under which one divined that they wore frock-coats, asked for light gloves.

One gentleman, elegantly attired, and wearing the red ribbon of a commander, called for pale gray gloves. A lady from the provinces, dressed in garnet satin and a white hood, greatly annoyed several impatient customers who were waiting their turn to be served. She wished a snug-fitting glove, of good quality, with the buttons well sewed on; but when she heard that the price was six lire, she put on a scandalized air, compressed her lips, and departed without buying anything, holding in her hand her card of invitation to the Chamber.

A deputy from the South, with a heavy brown moustache, told one of his constituents that he had just lost his gloves, and the poor miserable devil of a constituent listened with a resigned smile, having probably no money wherewith to purchase gloves for himself.

A lady descended from a carriage and entered the shop. She was tall, and her face was heavily "made up," the lips blood-red and the eyebrows almost a blue-black, contrasting strangely with her light blond coiffure. She was dressed entirely in white, with a heavily plumed hat, and carried a parasol of cream lace. She asked for eighteen-button black gloves. Heavy bracelets rattled on her round, bare wrists.

A small deputy, short and stout, with a black beard and bright eyes, watched her slyly, while complaining to his colleague, a handsome blond man, of the malicious tricks played upon him by the authorities: for instance, he was always chosen to be one of the party to receive the King and the Queen at the door of the Legislative Chamber—he, a democrat of the Extreme Left, was compelled to salute and offer his arm to a lady of the Court!

"I rather like fashionable women myself," said his colleague, with a fatuous smile.

"Perhaps!" the other replied.

They left the shop, looking at the dazzling blonde as she got into her carriage, and catching a glimpse of a pink card tucked into the lace on the front of her bodice: a card of admission to a reserved seat in the gallery!

"The revenge of the proletariat," said the republican deputy, with a smile.

By this time there was a throng in the glove shop, composed chiefly of government employés, freshly shaved, with home-laundered white cravats, light top-coats and black trousers; some of these officials sported the green ribbon of St. Maurice and St. Lazarus, which

appeared to impart a still more cadaverous tint to their sallow faces. Nearly all wore slightly *passé* top hats, which had been newly blocked and ironed for the great day.

The plump and smiling proprietor seemed never weary, never lost her head, and responded to every demand with unvarying courtesy. She had sold her whole stock of white cravats, and when the Honorable Di Santamarta arrived—a pale Sicilian, with a Mephistophelian expression—she was grieved to the heart at not being able to supply him with a cravat, as he was one of her best customers. She had just sold the last white cravat, but Salvi, over there, at the corner of the Piazza Sciarra, would surely have some. The Marquis listened to her, his blue eyes lighted by an indolent sceptical smile.

“And is the Signora Marchesa in Rome now? Of course she will be present at the opening of Parliament?”

“Yes, I believe so,” the Honorable Marquis replied. “She will be there with her sister. I came out early expressly to buy a cravat. What a bore, all this fuss!”

He moved toward the door with a languid air, as if making a superhuman effort. At the threshold he turned:

“At Salvi’s, did you say?” he inquired with a drawl.

“At Salvi’s, yes; in the Piazza Sciarra.”

For a moment the little shop was quiet. The two assistants leaned wearily against the counter, following the example of the proprietor, who rested her arms on the shelf among the open boxes and disordered packets of gloves. The bustle of the morning had been like that

of one of the mad days in carnival time, when the shop of the pretty Milanese was filled with a crowd of young gallants, milliners, valets, grumbling husbands, and impatient lovers.

A family of Neapolitans now entered—father, mother, and daughter—and asked to see some gloves. They said at once that they were going to the opening of Parliament; that they had had three tickets given to them; one by the Baron Nicotera, another by Philippe Leala—the Honorable Leala, the secretary-general who had such a lovely black beard!—and the third by an usher attached to the Montecitorio Palace—a compatriot, this usher, a fine fellow at home, and with five medals, if you please! It was not easy to get these cards of invitation—on the contrary, very difficult, indeed! They knew a lady, the aunt of a deputy, who had been unable to get one. They were a little worried lest they should not all be able to sit together in the same gallery, because of the different colors of their cards, but never mind! they certainly should not get lost!

“I believe you will have to go in through separate entrances,” calmly observed the fair mistress of the shop, struggling to fit a glove to the fat red hand of the girl. The father looked at his wife in dismay.

The shop was again filled with fresh customers, all eager and impatient; a double row of buyers formed in front of the counter, and the air was filled with a penetrating human odor—the subtle feminine aroma that intoxicates.

The bright autumn sunlight struck obliquely across

the Piazza Colonna. The Antonine Column looked somber and smoky in the clear white light, and stood out like a dark and wrinkled hunchback against the red façade of the Piombino Palace. Golden atoms sparkled in the air. In all directions the windows were draped with tricolored flags; at the Austrian Embassy the flags of the two nations were fraternally intertwined, their vivid coloring seemed to sound a joyous note in the golden atmosphere.

The yellow pavement, extending along the Corso and the Piazza Colonna to the Montecitorio Palace, gave forth a metallic reverberation. The terrace of the Circolo Nazionale was gay with parasols—red, blue, white, and all colors. From both sides of the Corso came a dazzling multitude, with gold epaulettes glittering on masculine shoulders, and light-tinted feathers waving on feminine hats.

By half-past nine the military cordon had blocked all points of passage, and, ascending toward Montecitorio, had surrounded the obelisk.

There were animated disputes at every street corner between the officers and persons who wished to pass the lines without a card; each professed to be an intimate friend of some deputy—ah, he could even see him in the distance—over there!—standing under the arch. And frantic signs were then made, but alas! the deputy never noticed them.

A motley crowd pressed close behind the line of soldiers; here and there a white or a red gown gave a touch of color to the dark ranks,

Before the principal entrance a wide, sandy space was left clear; from time to time a few gentlemen, with top-coats unbuttoned, or two or three ladies, fashionably gowned, crossed this space at a leisurely pace, the better to be observed.

A group of three pretty women chatted near the great gate; one was attired in black, her bodice a sparkling mass of jet; another wore a costume of delicate gray; and the third was dressed in blue. They laughed and talked in clear tones, exchanged a profusion of compliments, and, conscious that they were envied and admired by the crowd, they prolonged this delightful moment. Then with a gay "*A rivederci*" they entered the palace.

The crowd increased every moment, coming from all directions, ebbing and flowing like a human tide against the wall of the military cordon.

The windows of the Albergo Milano were filled with curious faces, and from the windows in the mansard roofs appeared the smooth-shaved faces of man-servants and the white caps of maids.

The large bay-windows of the Pensione dell' Unione, the small-paned windows of the *Fanfulla*, and the balconies of the Wedekind Palace, contained several rows of spectators; and in the adjacent streets the houses, terraces, even the roofs, were black with people. At Aragno's Café the women had climbed up on the tables in order to see over the heads of the crowd.

The solemn hour of the formal opening approached; the invited guests began to cross the open space in front of the main entrance, the gravel crackling under their

feet. Occasionally some one appeared with a row of medals glittering on his lapel. The carriages arrived, with their horses at a trot, turning the obelisk with a sweeping curve and drawing up before the grand entrance. These were the official carriages, containing the ministers, senators, and the diplomatic corps; from them descended elderly gentlemen, assisted by a servant or a secretary; a blue or a red uniform was visible an instant, and then disappeared in the palace.

On a small platform two journalists in black coats and soft hats jotted down the names of the celebrities that passed; one was short, with a pointed beard and cold gray eyes behind gold eyeglasses; the other was stout and pale, with a sparse moustache and a mocking smile. They were the managers of two great Roman newspapers, reporting in person the events of this important day, and laughing slyly at some of the odd-looking persons that passed.

The sun was now shining full upon the Piazza Montecitorio, lighting up the ranks of the soldiery, with their white gaiters, blue capes, shining leather caps, and the glitter of steel and of gold laces. A low, heavy rumble was heard coming from a distance: the sound of cannon. From that vast throng arose one great sigh of satisfaction:

"The procession! The procession!" was heard on all sides.

The roar of cannon had been audible in the Legislative Chamber. There was a moment of perfect silence; then a light murmur of voices arose, fans fluttered, femi-

nine chatter went on, mingled with the *frou-frou* of silken skirts, and laughter discreetly suppressed.

The Chamber was transformed. A temporary gallery, accommodating four rows of guests, had been constructed behind the last row of deputies' benches. The two side stairways were closely packed with people, the ladies sitting on the steps, while the men stood leaning against the frail balustrade.

The galleries, too, were crowded. The gallery for the press, which was the most advantageously placed for hearing the speeches, had been given up to the public for this occasion, and the reporters were scattered here and there in the best places.

The ladies' gallery abounded in brilliant costumes, and that of the military fairly glittered with gold lace and epaulettes. The Speaker's gallery resounded with sighs and complaints, for the royal canopy had been placed directly under it, and this would hide the King from view. The two large *loges* at the corner, for the senate and the diplomatic corps, were still empty, heavily shaded by the blue velvet draperies on their brown walls.

The benches had been removed from the semicircle, as well as the long bench for the Ministers, called by the Opposition "the bench of the accused." The small table for the stenographers had disappeared also, and a platform covered with red cloth had been erected on the spot where the speaker's chair usually stood. Over this a large red velvet canopy, fringed with gold, cast a mysterious shadow on the royal throne, upon which the

gold decoration sparkled like the ornaments on a sacred reliquary.

The members were grouped in the semicircle, bowing to acquaintances, smiling at pretty women, making friendly signals to their constituents. The light, frivolous laughing chatter of the ladies could be heard above all other sounds.

A handsome brunette, wearing a coquettish pink hat, regarded with amused interest the distinguished political personages pointed out to her by the Honorable Rosolino Scalia, a Sicilian member, of correct and serious demeanor, looking like an officer in civilian attire, and wearing a small withered daisy in his buttonhole.

The lady listened to his explanations, leaned forward, threw quick glances here and there through her lorgnette, with a satirical smile on her pretty face—Oh, was that the Honorable Cavalieri, the Calabrian—the deputy who was so notoriously Calabrian? A patriot, was he? Yes, of course—everyone knew that; but he wore too many decorations! And that thin blond man, with his hair brushed straight back—was that the Honorable Dalma, the literary deputy who talked in the House about Ophelia and against the taxing of women? Why was he not made a Minister? Was it indeed a genuine passion with them, this devotion to politics—and why? Scalia, somewhat bored by her frivolous prattle, tried to prove to the lady that, however trifling the great game of politics might seem to those who did not take it seriously, it was none the less noble and worthy of devotion. But she shook her head, unconvinced, her silvery,

frivolous laugh ringing out again, and she continued to bore her companion with idle questions.

The public was not impatient. The women were only too happy to sit there on view, shown off like dolls in a window; they fluttered their fans, made quick movements of the head in order to make their diamond earrings sparkle, and used their opera-glasses continually.

The men complained of having been compelled to make a formal toilet so early in the day; some affected to be bored to death. But invitations to luncheons circulated, and many appointments to dine at the restaurants were made, in order to talk over the ceremonies of the day.

The Chamber itself was not in harmony with the brilliant gathering. Certainly, the windows of the skylight in the dome had been washed, but the rosy light of that bright morning fell white and cold through the glass, like the pale rays that pass through the transparent walls of an aquarium. The dark wood of the vast hall, with its blue border, seemed to absorb all the light, reducing the whole interior to a gloomy monotone. Nevertheless, this place, which equalized the faces of all sorts and conditions of men, this democratic uniformity, to which the most rebellious must submit, produced a profound impression: the Chamber appeared as a sacred place, where personal individuality was swallowed up; a mysterious spot, wherein reigned intelligence, will, and energy, in which, to be distinguished from the multitude, a man must possess an almost incredible amount of religious ardor, or a degree of sacrilege so audacious as to enable him to overthrow an altar. And the great royal canopy,

with its rich and heavy red velvet folds, bordered with gold fringe and gathered up and fastened by the claws of a golden eagle, the throne standing within a mysterious shadow, gave the effect of a tabernacle or of some sacred shrine wherein was hidden an unknown power.

Suddenly the deputies hastened to their places, silence fell upon the humming galleries; without, the *bersaglieri* blew the clear notes of the trumpets. A great burst of applause rent the air; even the ladies clapped their daintily gloved hands vigorously, leaning forward to get a better view.

From the diplomatic gallery the Queen bowed to right and left, and the dazzling fairness of her complexion triumphed over the general dinginess of the surroundings. She looked still fresh and youthful under the wide border of her hat. And, as she seated herself slightly in advance of her suite, a new, resounding, and enthusiastic acclamation greeted her, which drew forth another gracious salute.

The spectators became excited; they leaned to the right and the left; the journalists exchanged audible remarks:—Where is the German Ambassador?—Over there, see! with his good-natured face, his white moustache and gray eyes.—Who is the lady in violet, behind the Princess Colonna?—Oh, that is the Princess Lavinia Taverna, a Piombino.—The murmur and chatter broke out afresh; questions, answers, and discussions made a sound like the buzzing of a million flies.

Now the King appeared at the entrance on the right, surrounded by the gentlemen of his household and his

ministers, and followed by the deputies whose duty it had been to receive him.

In three steps he was under the canopy, made two or three nervous, involuntary movements, and saluted the assemblage with his beplumed gold helmet. Brown and thin, but strong, wearing the uniform of a general, with white collar, close-fitting trousers, helmet on his head, and taking the attitude of a soldier at attention, he was the ideal picture of a military leader, ready to fight, to ride, or to sleep under a tent; he resembled one of those ancient portraits of a general-in-chief, with pale brow and eagle glance, presenting with a bold gesture a parchment on which is drawn the plan of a fortress

The old Prince di Savoia-Carignano, the King's uncle, placed himself at the right of the throne and remained respectfully standing, the Duke di Genoa, brother of the Queen and cousin of the King, stood at the left, a little in the background; and ranged in a semicircle were the Ministers and the members of the royal household.

The voice of the King, somewhat harsh and strident, rose in the midst of a profound silence. Many of the auditors remembered a former assembly, when another voice, equally harsh and a little indistinct, had pronounced the loyal words that had sealed the national compact. Every face was attentive, all eyes were fixed upon the King, whose breathing was distinctly audible between one sentence and the next.

The Queen, seated in the diplomatic gallery, listened without a smile, her handsome face grave and serious; the ladies of the Court also appeared deeply absorbed;

the ambassadors listened with amiable smiles; the public hung upon the royal words, without losing a syllable; and the deputies, standing, paid the strictest attention to their sovereign's remarks.

From time to time a thrill of satisfaction ran through the assemblage, and twice his Majesty was interrupted by applause. Occasionally some strongly accented phrase seemed to rise toward the dome: *peace—justice—finance!* Then the King would suddenly lower his voice, as if he disdained the final applause which he knew would follow his words. He hastened his closing phrases, as if fatigued, and the end of the message was barely audible. He took up his helmet quickly from the chair where he had placed it, amid cries of "Long live the King!"

The assemblage remained motionless a moment, impressed by the spectacle of their King, who, once a year, appeared before them to express his wishes and to give them solemn promises. Some of the more sensitive women felt a light, cold moisture of perspiration on their temples; others fanned themselves with feverish haste, murmuring "Beautiful! beautiful!" while the greater number sought to discover traces of emotion on the pale face of the Queen.

The swearing-in began. The old Depretis advanced, and read the formula for the deputies and the senators, scanning the words as if he wished to imprint them on the memory of his auditors.

The Duke di Genoa was the first to take the oath, which he did in naval fashion, with an energetic gesture and a vibrant voice; some one applauded him.

Eight new senators succeeded him. Depretis pronounced their names aloud, pausing a moment after each one, and from the group was heard sometimes a weak voice, sometimes a strong one, saying, "I swear!"

In that moment of waiting, all seemed to hold their breath, while the King looked at the man whose name had been called, examining him curiously.

The old soldiers took the oath in military fashion, with hand on the heart; the lawyers took it in loud tones, that the whole audience might hear them; the veteran parliamentarians repeated the formula with an indifferent air and in an undertone, while the radicals hurried over the ceremony as if to get rid of a disagreeable duty. When Depretis's own turn came, he withdrew his right hand from the breast of his ministerial uniform, extended his arm and took the oath with much solemnity. For some reason, this made many of the spectators laugh.

The new members were deeply impressed by all this parliamentary pomp, and those among them who appeared to be the most self-contained and confident trembled when they heard their names called, and took the oath in faint tones that were barely audible. Others played nervously with their watch-chains, ejaculated a smothered "I swear!" and fell back into their chairs.

Between a Florentine duke and the Deputy Santini, the Honorable Francesco Sangiorgio took the oath in a voice so low that no one heard it.

At the conclusion of the ceremonies, the deputies hastened out to the grand entrance to see the King and

the Queen get into their carriage. The throng inundated the Piazza Montecitorio, and, at the appearance of the royal equipage, from all the streets, houses, balconies, roofs and terraces, a frantic acclamation rose and swelled in the clear air.

CHAPTER IV

MYSTERIES OF ROME

NUMBER 50 in the Via Angelo Custode was next door to a great seigneurial palace, gray, damp, and dismal. Francesco Sangiorgio hesitated, for he saw no one to whom he could apply for information. At last he risked himself within the dark vestibule, and on tiptoe approached a winding stairway.

He began the ascent, first lighting a match in order to see his way. At the first floor there was a little more light, and at the second he could almost see. Three doors opened upon this landing, and upon the middle door was pinned a soiled card bearing the name *Alessandro Bertacchini*. The deputy consulted the paper given to him by the house-agent. This was the right place. He knocked.

No one came; he knocked again. Then he heard a rattling of keys and chains, of bolts pushing and drawing, and finally the door was half-opened, revealing a man with a red nose and hair curling on his temples. The Honorable Sangiorgio raised his hat, and inquired whether this was the apartment of Signor Alessandro Bertacchini.

"Precisely, Signor! I am he."

"Have you not an apartment to rent on the third floor?"

Signor Alessandro eyed the stranger carefully, observed the gold medal, and responded affirmatively. He thrust his hands into his pockets, then left the deputy standing on the landing for a moment, while he went to find his keys. Through the half-open doorway Sangiorgio perceived a dim antechamber, containing only a chair, a table and a lamp, and sending forth a disagreeable odor of ancient dust and dirt.

"Here I am, Signor," murmured Signor Alessandro, returning quickly.

He opened the door at the left, showing a tiny room furnished with a single chair. They entered it, and passed through into a long narrow room.

On one side of this apartment stood a sofa covered with crimson cloth, flanked by two armchairs decorated with crocheted "tidies," and on the floor lay small squares of carpet serving as rugs. Opposite was a white marble mantelpiece, on which stood two large petroleum lamps, a silent clock, and a few framed photographs.

Hanging on the wall was a mirror of greenish glass, with little colored pictures of the royal family stuck in its frame. Before the window stood a small writing-table, ornamented with a knitted cover, formed of green, violet, scarlet, and orange stars, with a match-holder sewed to the center. The windows were hung with long lace curtains beneath red woolen draperies.

"This is the drawing-room," said Signor Alessandro, with an air of fatigue, his chilled hands still thrust into the pockets of his short coat.

Francesco Sangiorgio approached the window, which

gave a view of an inside courtyard, surrounded by other windows, back yards, and balconies. A branch of a tree projected from the yard of a neighboring house. From the various kitchens rose an odor of cabbage, dirty kettles and stale water. Signor Alessandro said nothing, but allowed the deputy to examine the apartment.

The bedroom appeared as narrow as a trench; along one side stood the bed, the night-table, and an armchair covered with blue cloth, on which a great stain had obliterated part of the color. Opposite this was a bureau, the top of which had been stained with dampness, and on which stood a drinking-glass between two empty copper candlesticks.

The toilet-table occupied a corner, and this, too, displayed lace curtains surmounted by drapery of black cretonne covered with huge blue and yellow roses. The luxury of this room consisted in a brown woolen quilt on the bed, decorated with an arabesque design in many colors.

"What is the price of this apartment?" asked the Honorable Sangiorgio.

"Eighty lire a month—in advance," murmured Signor Alessandro.

"And the service?"

"I have a woman who makes the bed, sweeps, brushes the clothes and polishes shoes. Eight lire a month extra—in advance." Here he sighed deeply, and smoothed his hair, which was as black and polished as ebony.

"Ah! That is rather dear—eighty lire."

Signor Alessandro made no reply, appearing not to

have animation enough to discuss the matter. He merely added, as they left the apartment:

"You could have private entrance."

The deputy departed, shrugging his shoulders.

In the street he met the wife of the Minister he had seen at the railway station. Tall, slender, and graceful, attired in black, with a velvet cloak, she looked very youthful and rosy under her little veil. She walked rhythmically, her hands in her muff, with drooping eyelids, as if in deep thought. In that face shone so much sweetness and dignity that Sangiorgio saluted her involuntarily. She did not notice him, but continued her walk undisturbed.

The young man felt some annoyance at being thus ignored; he turned his steps toward the Piazza del Pantheon, to seek another house mentioned by the agent.

This building was close to the Pantheon, and next door to a bake-shop.

In the basement were two windows, with white shades. Sangiorgio mounted to the first floor, and saw three doors, each bearing pink-tinted cards inscribed in violet ink with feminine names.

The right-hand door, which had the name *Virginia Magnani*, was opened by a slatternly maid, who stared boldly at Sangiorgio without speaking. Her mistress appeared immediately—a little woman in a blue tea-gown adorned with white lace, with her hair in curl-papers and diffusing a strong odor of musk.

"Has the Signor come to inquire about the apartment?" she said sweetly.

"You may go, Nanna! Come in, come in, Signor, I am entirely at your service. Do excuse me for receiving you like this, but in the morning one never quite finishes dressing. I often go to the theater with Toto to hear Duse, so of course we get up rather late after it."

The deputy listened, astonished at the loquacity of this powdered and perfumed little woman.

"Did Pachalsky send you here?" said she inquisitively
"Yes, Signora."

"I thought so. Pachalsky knows that I rent my room exclusively to deputies. But come in, Signor. This is the reception-room, with a table and writing-materials for the use of constituents who may call and find their deputy out. The Honorable Santelli lived here for some time. He was besieged with callers from morning till night; he never had a minute's rest, and hardly had time to breathe. He used to say to me when we chatted together—he was so polite, that Honorable Santelli!—'Signora Virginia, I cannot go on like this' Here, as you see, is the drawing-room—neat and elegant. I worked all this tapestry myself, in days when I was younger and happier than now—alas! The general effect is very comfortable—with curtains, carpets, cushions—everything! The Deputy Gagliardi was so well pleased here that he never would have left me if the voters in his district had not played him the trick of not re-electing him. But political life is full of such disappointments!"

She assumed a grave air, compressing her lips, and holding her head on one side.

The drawing-room, as a matter of fact, was not dissimilar to the one in the Via Angelo Custode. There were a few more faded hangings, a greater number of photographs, and a rocking-chair; the gilded frame of the mirror was covered with green gauze, to protect it from flies.

"And this," the Signora Virginia continued, in a strong Roman accent, "is the bedroom. There is a little library also, for most of my guests are very studious. There was the Honorable Gatti—he was always reading romances. Do you read novels, Signor?"

"No, Signora, never."

"I am sorry for that, for you might have lent me some new ones! This room really needs a clothes closet, but I am waiting for a good chance to buy one. But you could let me take your things and I will hang them in my wardrobe, where they will be quite safe. Otherwise, as you see, nothing is lacking—here are the toilet-table and bed—eider-down quilt—everything! And all so clean! It does not become me to say it, of course, but every morning Toto thanks God for having given him a wife like his Virginia! And now—to whom have I the honor of speaking?"

"Francesco Sangiorgio."

"Deputy from"—

"Tito, in the Basilicata."

"Well, Honorable Sangiorgio, the price of this charming little apartment is one hundred and thirty lire a month, not a centesimo less, because I really make nothing from it. If I had to depend upon letting my rooms,

I should fare badly. In the reception-room there is a door leading to my own rooms, but when it is locked you have your own private entrance. Should you require a private entrance, Signor?"

And she regarded him narrowly, with a cat-like gaze. The deputy did not understand.

"Why—really—I do not know," he replied at random.

"Because in that case the price would be twenty lire more each month—in all, one hundred and fifty lire. But if you are married, and require other rooms for your wife, my sister has two on this floor that she will rent."

"I am a bachelor, Signora."

"Oh, then we will say no more about that. And you are wise not to marry too young. I, thank heaven! have no reason to complain, because my Toto is the best of men, but liberty is sweet! I used to say that to the Honorable Gatti, who was a bachelor like yourself, and he would say gallantly, 'I would not marry unless I could find another Virginia, but there are no more like her!' Well, as we were saying—one hundred and thirty lire a month, ten lire for service, and five lire for the light on the stairs, the gas to burn until eleven o'clock. I could look after your washing, too; I have an excellent laundress, and she never uses potash in the water. And if you ever tire of restaurant dinners, and wish for a cozy little meal at home, Toto, my husband, amuses himself with making dumplings that are indeed fit for a king. I never go into the kitchen myself; I am too delicate."

Sangiorgio remained cold and distant under this flow of words.

"Well, what is your decision, Signor Deputy?" suddenly demanded the Signora Virginia, in a harder tone. "I have many applicants, as of course you understand that an apartment like this does not remain long vacant."

"I do not wish to cause you to lose a lodger, Signora," said the deputy, whose naturally suspicious mind was aroused. "I will write you my decision."

"I may expect a letter, then. Shall I call for it at Parliament House?" the little woman replied, again becoming obsequious.

"Do not trouble yourself, Signora. I will send the letter here."

The Signora bowed and extended her hand, with the gesture of a great lady. Sangiorgio left the house quite dazed with her gabble; he felt as fatigued as if he had visited ten houses.

Two more addresses were inscribed on his bit of paper; he took a carriage to go to the Via del Gambero, since he did not know the way. This street had the air of mystery peculiar to the streets parallel to the Corso, the thoroughfare of hurrying men and women with *affaires* on their minds. The great Palazzo Raggi, with its courtyard as large as a whole square, was often passed by persons who were trying to avoid the crowd, or to escape some dangerous encounter, and who walked rapidly without looking behind them.

Number 37 was a respectable-looking place, with a little vestibule lighted by small windows. A woman came out to meet the deputy.

"Have you an apartment to let on the third floor?"

"Yes, Signor. Do you wish to see it?"

"Yes."

The woman chose a key and entered the house, making a sign to Sangiorgio to follow her. She wore an old green gown, faded and worn, with soiled satin trimming. Her head was covered with a red wig, with a braided chignon and frizzes on the forehead, and she sported red silk stockings with run-down slippers. In her flabby, freckled cheeks, in the purplish hue of her infantile mouth were traces of a countenance that must once have been full, round and rosy, but which with age had collapsed, like that of a doll from which the sawdust has run out.

The stairway was wide and light, with three doors on each landing. On the first floor, at the right, Sangiorgio read: *Barone di Sangarzia, Deputy*; no card was on the middle door, but on that at the left an inscription read: *Anna Scartozzi, Dressmaker*.

On the second floor, at the right, the card announced: *Marchese di Tuttavilla, Deputy*, the middle door again was blank, and the one on the left had a card marked: *Bureau of Commissions*.

"Do these two deputies occupy furnished rooms?" inquired Sangiorgio

"No, Signor, the furniture is their own, but the plan of the apartments is the same as the others," the woman replied, unlocking the door at the right on the third floor, where a card on the door at the left read: *Paul Galasso, Dentist*.

The apartment was very light and gave a good view

of the street. The furniture had some pretensions to elegance. A vase of fine faience stood on a table, and there was a fireplace—a real fireplace—the height of luxury in a Roman house of the middle class.

"You can light a fire here, you see, and on a winter evening, after dinner, that is delightful," said the woman "Each apartment has its own fireplace; and the deputy on the first floor keeps a fine fire burning all day long."

"But does he not attend Parliament?" inquired Sangiorgio, surprised.

"Not always—not always!" the woman answered, her face wrinkling into a malicious smile

"And what is the price of these apartments?" Sangiorgio, surprised.

"One hundred and eighty lire a month, Signor."

"That is very dear."

"Oh, no, Signor! If you will inquire about prices, you will see that that is very reasonable for an apartment in the middle of Rome, two steps from the Corso. And of course it is not for me to boast, but the rooms are really charming"

She furtively fluffed up the front frizzes of her shabby wig.

"It is dear," Sangiorgio insisted.

"Of course, you are not compelled to take it, Signor, but I assure you that you will not find anywhere an apartment like this, with a fireplace and a private entrance, elegant furniture, everything quiet, and everyone minding his own affairs and not inquiring about his neighbors'. The deputy on the first floor has been here

more than four years, and the one on the second floor two years. The dressmaker has only the best custom—the most aristocratic ladies in Rome drive up in their carriages to my door”—

“That may be true, but really it does not concern me.”

“True, Signor! But I am sure you will return, for you will find nowhere a place like this. Yes, you will return, Signor Deputy, believe me!”

As Sangiorgio descended the stairs, he met a lady coming up, she was enveloped in a large otter cape, and her face was covered with a thick veil. She ascended slowly, and paused near the door of the dressmaker.

“One of Scartozzi’s customers,” whispered the woman to Sangiorgio. “She has come to try on a gown, probably.”

But the fair unknown proceeded to ascend the next flight, and knocked at the door of the deputy on the second floor.

In order to finish this tiresome business in one morning, Sangiorgio ordered his coachman to drive to the last address on his list, in the Via di Due Macelli, a bright, sunny street, having a certain air of aristocratic refinement.

Number 128 was situated between an English grocer’s shop, which gave forth a piquant odor, and a florist’s hot-house, with a fine display in the windows of reeds, rushes, baskets of gilded wickerwork or of rustic wood, in which were growing roses and lilies of the valley, the first of the season. The stairs were marble, white and shining, and well lighted from above.

On each landing were handsome doors of veined maple, ornamented with bright brass knockers. A man in livery opened a door and showed the Honorable Sangiorgio into a dim reception-room, saying that he would inform the Signora of his presence.

The deputy felt his feet sink into a soft, thick carpet, and groped his way in the half-light to a seat in a low and luxurious armchair. He distinguished a large center-table, covered with yellow plush, on which stood a Japanese ash-tray and a graceful Venetian vase.

A light step was heard, and the mistress of the house entered. She was tall, with a finely-moulded figure; her hair was carefully waved, and held in place by light tortoiseshell combs. Her gown was of simple black, but of soft and rich material, with a high collar of snowy linen fastened with a gold horseshoe pin.

"Will you come with me, Signor?" said the lady softly.

They went out on the landing; in the clearer light she appeared to be about thirty years old, with a complexion of ivory whiteness and deep, mysterious black eyes.

The apartment to which she conducted Sangiorgio was small, but bright and cheerful. The drawing-room was furnished in pink and gray chintz, of delicate tones; the mirror had a frame of handsomely carved wood; a low sofa stood near a window draped with long embroidered muslin curtains that touched the floor. A variety of photographs was scattered over the walls, as if thrown here and there by chance.

A small cabinet stood in a corner; upon it was a red plush photograph frame, empty. The bedroom had pale-

blue satin furniture, with the toilet-table draped in white muslin held by knots of satin ribbon. There was a wardrobe with glass doors, a pretty little bed, and at the lace-draped windows the same tender shade of blue was repeated in transparent curtains of silk.

"There is a dressing-room also," the lady murmured, without a smile.

"I will not trouble you to show it," the deputy replied.

"No, no, I wish to show it to you, because it has a private entrance from the hall. It is very convenient," she added, simply, looking attentively at one of her hands, and stroking it to make it look whiter. In her black robe, with its statuesque folds, her regular Roman features and alabaster skin, she commanded respect. Sangiorgio treated her as if she were a woman of high society.

"This apartment is too luxurious for me," said he, with a slight touch of shyness. "I admire it very much, but my habits are most plain and simple."

"Ah!" said the lady, with an expression of polite incredulity.

"Yes, I assure you I am somewhat of a savage," he continued. "I need only a quiet place for my work—nothing more. I pass all my time at Parliament House. This place is rather—rather feminine, I think."

"Possibly. I had a Russian lady here last, but she was suddenly recalled to her own country." She paused.

"What is the price?" the deputy inquired hesitatingly.

"Two hundred and fifty lire a month," the lady replied nonchalantly, adjusting the golden horseshoe.

"Service and gas included, I suppose?" said Sangiorgio, with polite curiosity.

"You must arrange about service with my maid."

"Oh, certainly—of course!" said the deputy apologetically.

The lady of the mysterious eyes showed Sangiorgio silently to the door, took leave of him with a smile—her first—but did not offer to shake hands with him.

By this time the deputy felt exhausted, overcome by a sort of moral lassitude. The November sun seemed to send forth rays as ardent as those of midsummer, and the air felt stifling.

There certainly had been some subtly powerful perfume in that house—one of those perfumes that excite the nerves and senses; perhaps it had been worn by that strange woman, so pale, so severe, looking like a patrician abbess in her long black robe. As he walked along slowly, he pondered over that pretty pink and gray drawing-room, so fresh in its simplicity, and the dainty blue chamber with its floating muslin curtains, which seemed like a cozy nest, perched high in the air, far from all disturbance. His mind dwelt upon that retreat as the place where the unknown Russian lady must have reposed, with the dreams of an incomprehensible foreigner; of that little cabinet where she must have written her letters; of the toilet-table which had reflected her beauty; above all, of that red plush frame, standing empty as if a hasty traveler had taken from it some cherished photograph.

Sangiorgio had unconsciously entered the Café Aragno;

he sat down in a small room at the rear, and ordered a glass of cognac to cheer his depressed spirits.

He found himself thinking again of the lady in the fur cloak whom he had passed on the stairs in the *Via del Gambero*, he had remarked at the time that she had a dainty little foot as she went up the stairs. The janitress must know who she was! What a fright she was, that old janitress, with her frowzy red wig! But who knows? She may have been handsome once! Then there was that curious *Signora Virginia*, who read novels while her husband cooked! What a queer world!

Little by little his spirits rose, and he felt an irresistible desire to decipher all these feminine puzzles: the *Via di Due Macelli*, the unknown Russian lady, and the mysterious eyes of the hostess; the *Via del Gambero*, the absurd janitress, and the veiled lady of the staircase; the house near the Pantheon, and the suggestive prattle of *Signora Virginia*.

He felt a strange curiosity to know more of these elusive creatures who appeared to be hastening and hiding from some one; and in his mind's eye, far above all these inferior beings, rose a compelling face, and a tall, stately figure, attired in richest black, her cheeks were like roses beneath her lace veil, and she walked with rhythmic step and lowered eyelids. Where could she have been going at that hour—that lady—the wife of his Excellency?

At this point in his reflections, Sangiorgio observed passing before his window the stout Duke di Bonito, the popular deputy from Naples. He walked with a heavy

rolling gait that made him resemble a pinnace, or merchant-vessel—one of those flat, black craft, loaded with coal or macaroni that run between small Neapolitan ports. His faithful friend, the Deputy Pietrarora, accompanied him—a man of calm face but of violent temper, who would sit for months in Parliament without speaking a word, and then suddenly break out some day into impassioned speech, astonishing everyone with his Southern intensity

The Honorable Sangiorgio followed them with his eyes; they stopped a moment on the sidewalk, saluting the member of the Neapolitan trinity, the Honorable Piccirillo, blond and rosy, the redoubtable orator of the faubourgs. Piccirillo told a story, gesticulating, waving his hand, which had been injured in a duel, twisting a button on the topcoat of the Duke, who laughed with incredulous irony, while Pietrarora, calm as always, listened, and delicately stroked his moustache

The sight of these men brought Sangiorgio's mind back to the parliamentary world; he felt refreshed, restored to himself. The women he had seen and talked to all day had filled his mind with idle trivialities and absurd perturbation. But now he had found again his moral equilibrium, and suddenly he comprehended the true character of all these furnished houses, apartments, and rooms, which are found in all parts of Rome, peopling it with a sordid mingling of *bourgeoise*, dressmakers, janitresses, and complaisant servants.

He realized what must be the intimacy necessarily established between these women and their lodgers, by a

continual promiscuity, an existence almost in common, by daily encounters at morning and evening. He could guess at the feminine domination beginning in the care of the rooms, extending to the laundry-work, then to the clothes, books and letters of the tenant, arriving by various ways to domination over the man himself. He perceived all the possibilities—dramatic, grotesque, and corrupt—that might arise from this system of private entrances, lodgings for various purposes, English latch-keys, doors open or locked, sliding bolts, mute bells, felt slippers, thick veils, and heavy mantles. And the great deceptiveness of Roman life—so correct in outward appearance, so corrupt beneath the surface—was at last made clear to his mind.

And, in his instinctive dread of the all-powerful feminine influence, in his wild desire for undisturbed solitude, he took the rooms in the Via Angelo Custode, where no women lived.

CHAPTER V

A ROMAN CHRISTMAS

THE Corso on a holiday: the shops closed, the sidewalks deserted, the cafés empty, hardly anyone in the streets, here and there a lady coming out of her house to be swallowed up in her carriage. A soft breeze seemed to bear caresses on its wings.

On that warm afternoon of Christmas Day, the ordinary life of Rome seemed suspended. The central part of the city and the Corso, usually so gay and animated, with its four great squares, its elegant shops, its noisy restaurants, its busy crowds, were plunged in profound silence.

The peace and calm of this sacred day—celebrated in the smaller cities by shouts of joy and discharges of musketry—astonished Sangiorgio, as did many things in this wonderful city of Rome, always new, always surprising.

After reading the morning newspapers, which were filled with sentimental poems and prose on the birth of the Christ-Child, Sangiorgio went out and strolled about the streets for an hour. He felt more and more surprised at the silence in all quarters, for he had imagined the streets would be filled with a merrymaking throng, full of gayety and rejoicing: while in reality Rome

seemed filled with the peaceful solemnity of a city of the dead. He regretted bitterly that he had not to spend Christmas with his old parents, in his poor and humble native Basilicata, and watch the burning of the Yule-log on the old familiar hearth.

While his mind was rebelling against the strange charm that held him in this magic city, he saw in the distance a group of men following one who held a tri-colored flag. Marching with regular step, in advance of the flag, were several men of grave and dignified aspect.

The color-bearer wore a leather cross-belt and an old hat perched rakishly over one ear. Twenty men, or perhaps more, followed him—old men wearing various medals, some of them with stooping shoulders, others being lame or half blind. These were the veterans of the battles of 1848-'49. The little procession was brought up in the rear by two men of unprepossessing appearance, with curled moustaches; they were two police detectives in plain clothes, carrying clubs under their coats. As they passed the Café Aragno, the waiters did not even turn their heads to look at the procession; they were well accustomed to this sort of manifestation.

Sangiorgio strolled idly along at a little distance from the procession, to see where they were going. As they passed the Pantheon—the tomb of the great king, Victor Emmanuel—the colors were dipped and the veterans saluted.

The procession moved on, threading the dark, narrow streets of the old part of the city: everywhere the shops

were shut, the windows closed, and a peaceful serenity reigned in the deserted streets and empty houses.

It stopped at the entrance of the Sistine Bridge. Here a little more animation was manifest: several persons stood looking at the Tiber, which was of a pale yellow under the wintry sky; carriages passed with their horses at a trot, moderating their pace at the curve of the bridge.

The whole quarter hereabouts was in process of demolition and reconstruction, heaps of stones, bricks, and rubbish lay about; in every direction could be seen the interior fittings of buildings, which had been torn out and thrown on the ground; also little lakes of hardened lime, overturned wheelbarrows, tall scaffoldings plastered with posters, and, in the distance, the beginning of a wide street, newly paved, and the barges lying at the quays of the Tiber.

Light clouds floated along the horizon, over the Via Farnesina, and the yellow river rippled softly. At one point an enormous black raft, looking like some implement of war but used in dredging, appeared to cut the stream in two.

The procession turned into the Trastevere, crowded with peasants in holiday garb. As the corner of a little street was turned, the procession and its followers found themselves suddenly in a wide avenue. On one side lay Rome, brilliant and attractive in the golden light; on the other rose the green summit of the Janiculum; midway between these showed the imposing walls of the Academy of Spain, around which curved the broad, wind-

ing road. Occasionally the procession was obliged to divide to make room for passing carriages, at the windows of some of which delicate feminine profiles could be seen.

At another turn of the street, Sangiorgio heard his name called. He started, turned, and recognized the Honorable Giustini, a Tuscan deputy and his neighbor in the Chamber. He joined him.

"Are you following the procession, my dear colleague?" inquired Giustini, in a slightly ironic tone.

"As a matter of curiosity—yes And you?"

"Oh, I—I am watching it pass, merely as a spectator. It is almost the same thing."

They turned and walked along together.

The Honorable Giustini was neither lame, humpbacked, nor deformed, but one of his legs dragged slightly, one shoulder was a little higher than the other, and he appeared not to know what to do with his hands. His complexion had a clayey tinge, and with his pale-tinted eyes, sparse beard, and general air of boredom and fatigue, he suggested a person suffering from physical and moral rickets.

"These celebrations," he said, "these processions, carrying flags and laying wreaths on graves, are all alike. I have seen thousands of them, shall see many more, and I have even joined in them myself. Who has not in the course of his life?"

"I have, certainly, when I was at the University," Sangiorgio replied.

"Who cares for all this nonsense?" Giustini continued,

shrugging his shoulders. "One must be very young to do so—say, twenty—the age of folly."

"Do not speak ill of youth," said Sangiorgio.

"Ah, to be sure—youth, love, death—the three themes sung by Leopardi. In reality, he sang only of two of them; the other claimed him for its own. All Southrons are Leopardists, are they not? What a bore he is! He took advantage of the fact that he was a humpback to write poetry and bore every one. I have a slight hump myself, but, thank God, I never have written any poems! Neither do I tire my colleagues at the Chamber by making long, windy speeches."

"That is true; you have not made a speech since Parliament opened."

"I wish my colleagues had followed my example. What insupportable babblers! What a prosy lot of talk about nothing!"

Sangiorgio listened to him in silence, continuing the study of men and things which he had begun as soon as he had arrived in Rome, and which later was to prove one of his strongest powers.

The procession now crossed the spacious square, on which opens the entrance to the Academy of Spain. Several carriages stood before the porte-cochère, one of which belonged to the Vatican, recognizable by its closely-shaved footman, looking like a sacristan in his black livery.

The pedestrians stopped to watch the little band file past; a tall, thin gentleman, with a blond beard, leaned

upon a cane and exchanged greetings with the veterans as they passed him.

"That individual would be very glad to belong to the modern movement, but that has not come yet," Giustini resumed in his malicious tones. "A handsome man, is he not? That is Giorgio Serra—of course you have heard of him? His is a striking type—a combination of poet, apostle, dreamer, and believer. He is a man of honor—one of the few really likeable democrats. In his tastes he is an aristocrat; though he loves the people because he has a heart naturally tender and affectionate. You will see that he will go up to the Janiculum to witness the ceremonies, but he will not speak; in some respects he is as delicately sensitive as a woman. We shall pass him in a moment, and you will see that he barely recognizes me, since he detests nothing more than the party to which you and I, my dear colleague, have the honor to belong."

"And why do you belong to it, Signor?"

"Oh—I? Why, indeed?" said Giustini, with an indifferent shrug.

The two deputies were obliged very often to stand aside in order to avoid swift-moving carriages.

"Are all these ladies going to see the ceremonies?" inquired Sangiorgio.

"Well, hardly!" said Giustini with a sneer. "Why, they don't even know that any ceremonies are about to take place. They are all going to drive near the Villa Pamfili; the weather is fine, this sweet air quiets the

nerves and soothes the mind—why bother themselves with serious things?”

“What you say is only too true!” said Sangiorgio, with a gesture of contempt for the female sex in general.

Giustini studied his face a moment, a little surprised. They had arrived at the Porta San Pancrazio. Two carabinieri paced to and fro before one of those little inns where they sell *vin des châteaux*, a cross-road descended, bordered on the left by a hedge, on the right by a high stone wall, in a projection of which was a worm-eaten wooden door, bearing the name of the villa hidden behind that wall: *Il Vascello*. Beside it was a memorial tablet, surrounded by a withered wreath.

The procession halted beneath the tablet; the spectators pressed close behind it, leaving a free space on the road for the carriages driving toward the Villa Pamfili.

The more elderly of the veterans grouped themselves around the flag, and stood silent and motionless, lost in recollections of the past. Our two deputies stood a little at one side of this group, Giustini affecting a bored air, while Sangiorgio, greatly interested, observed attentively all that went on.

A workman mounted a ladder and removed the withered wreath, carefully wiped off the tablet with his sleeve and placed upon it a garland of fresh flowers. The group beneath the ladder applauded him. Seated astride of the wall, the guardian of the property, one of those pale and melancholy Roman peasants, looked on indifferently.

A man suddenly climbed upon the driver's seat of a

fiacre, and was greeted by an enthusiastic cheer from the bystanders.

He was a young man, blond and rather stout, with a small moustache and light blue eyes, hands as white as a woman's, with almond-shaped nails and a large diamond ring on the little finger. He somehow suggested a hairdresser in Sunday attire, with his pink and slightly vulgar type of face. He smiled amiably, and raised a hand to ask for silence. The crowd pressed closer in order to hear him—veterans, students, workmen, carabineers and guards.

The young man began his discourse in the soft and well-modulated voice of a drawing-room tenor, stopping to make effective pauses in his remarks, making gestures almost coquettish in their grace, and explaining the reason why, after the commemoration ceremonies of the previous April, they were conducting the same in December.

Then he launched into a description of the siege of Rome, with as much interest as if he had been present on that occasion. The veterans nodded approval, much moved.

The orator spoke with ease and eloquence, although his style was cold. He evinced some warmth, however, in speaking of the priesthood and the Vatican, indicating the latter by a dramatic sweep of his arm toward the left, and rolling his *r*'s theatrically.

The veterans ceased to listen to him after a time; silent and abstracted, they were absorbed in the memories of that sacred hill where they had fought for their

country's freedom, where their brothers-in-arms had fallen with disfigured faces and breasts pierced by the bullets of the *chasseurs* from Vincennes. Now and then one would murmur a sentence, recalling some incident, shaking his head as he leaned with hands upon his cane. —“That night we heard the French talking merrily in their tents”—. —“Do you remember Garibaldi's negro servant, who died after his shoulder was shattered by a bomb?” —“What a superb man was Colonel Marara!” —“Handsome and brave!”

The orator concluded with a bombastic apostrophe to the Seven Hills of Rome, interspersed with a few banal allusions to events in Roman history. His friends, the students, crowded around him, full of enthusiasm, shouting and applauding. The young man bowed amiably, smiled, shook hands with everyone, and touched his forehead lightly with a fine handkerchief, bordered with black and perfumed with new-mown hay. The workmen and peasants looked on, unmoved, with cynical smiles on their thin lips. A voice cried:

“Serra! Serra! Where is Serra? Let Giorgio Serra speak!”

But Serra did not respond. Perhaps he was hiding modestly among the throng.

“Serra! Serra!” cried the people, trying to catch a glimpse of the picturesque head of the artist-poet.

But Serra had evidently disappeared. Perhaps the gentle dreamer, repelled by realities, had returned to that Rome he loved so well, or perhaps, following the line of the hedge abloom with roses and hawthorn, he

had lost himself among the shaded paths of the Villa Pamfili, dwelling again upon his cherished illusions in that peaceful seclusion, near to nature's heart.

"I told you he would not speak," said Giustini to Sangiorgio. "He hates oratory."

"He is wrong," Sangiorgio replied. "Oratory has great power."

Again the Tuscan deputy looked closely at the deputy from the South. There was no bond of sympathy, friendship, or interest between these two men, but each felt a certain curiosity, a desire to know the other's real nature, mingled with a vague distrust, like that of two fencers who have put themselves on guard and try to ascertain each other's skill before making an open assault.

The crowd dispersed slowly; the flag had been borne away; the veterans had disbanded and were returning to the city in little groups, with dragging step, and leaning wearily upon their canes. A few turned to obtain a last glimpse of the spot they had left.

The young orator had jumped out of the carriage, and now moved away with his friends. He had added to his boutonnière a rose plucked from the blooming hedge, and proceeded to smooth his gloves delicately upon his white hands, his slender stick tucked under one arm. The workmen returned to the little inn, where they gathered around a table to drink the sour and sulphurous *vin des châteaux*.

After ten minutes, not a person remained beside the monument raised in honor of the heroes of 1848. In the

solitude, the villa of *Il Vascello* resumed its aspect of a deserted house, of which only the façade remained standing. The sleepy guard perched on the wall was the only living thing in sight; he leaned his head on his hand, and gazed indifferently down the road.

The two deputies, chatting idly, had descended the hill as far as the great square of the Fountain of Paul III. Twilight came on, and a warm mist spread over the city. The carriages were now beginning to return toward Rome from the Villa Pamfili.

Leaning upon the parapet of the terrace that overlooks the city, the two men watched the passing vehicles, and several times Giustini bowed with somewhat perfunctory courtesy to certain ladies who recognized him.

"That is the Countess Baldassarri," he said, as a handsome carriage passed. "Very pretty woman—married to an old senator. But she is a little fool, and I no longer frequent her house. She is mad after literary men, and cares to have only poets call on her! There is always a crowd of them in her drawing-room.

"That lady is the Baroness Gagliarda—stupid, ugly, and full of malice. She is always planning to overthrow the Cabinet, and if by chance it does fall, she puts on an air of triumph. And, as a refinement of cruelty, she goes to visit the wives of the Ministers on the very day they are deposed. But she often launches young deputies in the social swim, and is of some importance—or, at least, she thinks she is!"

"Do you visit her house?"

"I? No, not now—I am no longer a young deputy! Ah, here is the wife of his Excellency."

Both men bowed profoundly, and, behind the window of her coupé, the lady graciously acknowledged the salute. Sangiorgio said nothing, but waited with a vague apprehension for some sarcastic remark from Giustini.

"Pretty woman, his Excellency's wife, but too young and too pretty for him. She is faithful to him, however—no one knows why. Her woman friends detest her cordially, but pretend to admire her. She is virtuous by calculation, by hypocrisy, and perhaps by natural coldness."

"Do you go to his Excellency's house?"

"No, I am too Ministerial in my leanings."

"What do you mean?"

"What should I do there? I am a convert, you see! You can understand, therefore, that I should not be welcome. But I might abandon the Opposition if I went often to that house. It irritates me to see so young and charming a creature tied to a dry old stick of a husband, who thinks of nothing but politics. Besides, Donna Angelica is so sweet and kind—she might spoil me."

"Donna Angelica!" murmured Sangiorgio.

Giustini did not hear him; he had lifted his hat again to the occupant of a passing carriage. This time the coupé stopped; a slender, black-gloved hand lowered the window and made a little sign of summons. Sangiorgio remained alone, looking at his colleague, who appeared to be talking with great animation to the lady

in the carriage. Presently he returned to Sangiorgio, saying:

"Would you like to be presented to the Countess Fiammanti?"

Sangiorgio had no time either to reply or to resist; he found himself before the door of the coupé

"Countess, the Honorable Sangiorgio, member from Tito—a Southerner and a new recruit."

The handsome gray eyes of the Countess were alight with coquetry, and a slightly mocking smile rested on her lips.

"I am glad, indeed, to make your acquaintance, Signor, because I have a veritable passion for the South. Rome must seem very dull to you—Naples is so gay. I adore it! My husband was a Neapolitan, and he taught me to love Naples, and everything southern. Not like your ugly Tuscany, Giustini, with the horrible Tuscan accent of the people."

"It is no doubt my accent, then, that always makes you stop me when I begin"—

"To make love to me, eh? No, my dear, it is because I like you too well to let you continue. Love is a stale old farce, which no longer amuses anyone, and I have a horror of being bored. We must seem very frivolous to you, Signor Sangiorgio. But we know how to be serious on occasion—for instance, when Giustini talks politics. Now, politics interests me very much—it really entertains me. And you, Signor?"

"Signora, it is the only thing that interests me," the Southerner replied, rather rudely.

"I may say the same," said the Countess, without appearing to notice his lack of courtesy.

"But in order to amuse oneself, one should not be too much absorbed by politics," murmured Sangiorgio, with so peculiar an intonation that the young woman allowed her eyes to rest upon his for a moment.

"Then, my dear Giustini, I shall see you again within two hours. Signor Sangiorgio, I am at home every other evening in the month—the third, the fifth, the seventh, and so on. I won't compel you to drink tea, but you may smoke. I sing fairly well. There will not be any other women. *A rivederci*!"

The carriage proceeded on the road toward Rome.

"Who is that lady?" Sangiorgio inquired.

"Why do you wish to know? Does she please you?"

"Yes, I rather admire her."

"Oh, very well, then accept her invitation; you will be amused. She is attractive, but not beautiful. Sometimes she is irresistible. She sings admirably, and is often very witty, though she talks too much. But she is a good sort."

"But what kind of woman is she?" Sangiorgio persisted.

"Oh—really, I don't know," the other replied, with a shrug. "I never have been able to become her lover."

"What is her name?"

"Elena Fiammanti."

They had arrived at the square before the Academy of Spain, deserted in the winter twilight.

"Behold Rome!" said Giustini, standing at the parapet

of the terrace. "Have you ever looked at it from this spot?"

"No, never."

"Rome is great—very great," said the Tuscan deputy, with an accent of melancholy.

"One would say she sleeps," said Sangiorgio.

"Sleeps? Do not deceive yourself! She does not sleep—she dreams and watches. Look down there—far to the left—at that great dome that seems to be effaced against the white clouds. Do you see it? That is Saint Peter's. Near Saint Peter's are several edifices surrounded by gardens. From this point they look small and plunged in profound darkness, that is the Vatican, and therein dwells the Pope. He is more than eighty years old, he is ill, Death hovers near him, but what matters that? He is strong! One half of the people in the world believe in him, prostrate themselves before him; implore him, and die in his name. Sangiorgio, do you believe in God?"

"No!"

"Nor I. But the Pope is strong. His adherents are the unfortunate, the weak, the humble, the poor, the young people, and the women—the women who transmit, from mother to daughter, not religion but the religious cult. It seems to you that all is sleeping, down there on the bank of the river, in the great palace decorated by Michelangelo? Undeceive yourself! That colossal edifice teems with a population of cardinals, bishops, curates, priests, monks, seminarists—ecclesiastics who by no means confine themselves to celebrating masses,

praying and singing. They go into many houses, penetrate into many families, teach in the schools; they love, hate, struggle, live for themselves, for the Church, and for the Pope. No one can realize their strength, their number, and their power."

"But Rome itself is atheistical," interrupted Sangiorgio.

"I am not talking of belief or of disbelief. Do you think that I am glorifying religion? The day of great convictions is past, but human interest is keener than ever. We dwell beside a vast mystery which works its will in darkness, but of which we do not even suspect the existence."

Giustini was silent a moment, absorbed in contemplation of the great city, which was rapidly being effaced in the shadows of evening. Sangiorgio listened, disturbed, conscious of a throbbing of the heart, as at the approach of a great danger

"Over there is the Quirinal," Giustini continued. "Yes—over there—under that rosy light. There are the King, the Queen, and the Court. Four balls, eight official receptions, forty dinners, four concerts, thirty private receptions, four hundred presentations, diamonds at the throat, decorations on the breast, plumes in the hair, bare shoulders, quadrilles of honor—but there is something besides all that vain show. That beautiful Queen, who greets with the same amiability her friends and her enemies, is a woman who feels, who thinks, who knows, who listens. The King, who bears so heavy a burden, sworn to perpetual obedience, has he not, too, a con-

science, an ideal, a will of his own? And the people of the Court, military or civil, ladies-of-honor or diplomats, majordomos or valets—all are occupied with their own concerns, their own struggles. They love, they hate, they have their own ambitions. All those women have certain desires, jealousies, regrets, perhaps sufferings."

As Giustini spoke, he scratched his finger-tips nervously along the top railing of the parapet, and threw pebbles and bits of rubbish out into the air. Sangiorgio followed attentively the movement of those thin brown hands, with their distended veins.

"From this point we cannot see Montecitorio," the Tuscan deputy went on, in a hard voice; "but I tell you it is a veritable furnace, wherein we are all slowly consumed—an even temperature such as silkworms are raised in, which weakens the will and engenders timidity. All the inhabitants of that palace of cards excite themselves, struggle, cry out, argue for a law, a railway, or a bridge. They wish to become Ministers, to wear a uniform, to turn their former friends into enemies, to be called rascals and robbers by such newspapers as have not been bribed, and other similar pleasant experiences. Some poor fellows even long to be prefects! Once I was one of them! Oh, that terrible furnace which desiccates the heart, burns it up with vain desires, and takes away all independence of will!"

By this time the horizon had turned to a delicate gray; the shadows of night floated above the city like a dusky veil.

Sangiorgio felt strangely disturbed; the Tuscan deputy appeared to him uglier and more disagreeable than ever, with that sneering grin which revealed two rows of yellow teeth.

"How quiet the city is!" Giustini resumed. "One would say that while sleeping it rejoices in the Christmas-tide. Well, such is not the fact. Up there, under the great trees of the Pincio and of the Villa Medici, the painters laugh, sing, amuse themselves, discuss heresies as they would discuss matters of art, and paint bad pictures. Over there, where you see that great white spot, are the new quarters. Have you ever been there? You would find sixty thousand workingmen, with their families, servants, dogs and cats—an encampment of hungry and disarmed barbarians, hating Rome, which they cannot comprehend. Their women can only bear ugly children and cook their miserable meals—pale women, with flat bosoms and red hands. These poor wretches have been celebrating Christmas in their duress, like true barbarians, dull and miserable, complaining of the government, of their servants, of Rome, the butcher and the baker. And the Romans—the true Romans—who put the adjective *Roman* to their names, like a title of nobility, who eat dumplings on Thursday, tripe on Sunday, and lamb every day, who like light wines and fireworks at Saint Angelo, who are proud of their *can Marcienne* and allow vermin to swarm in their ruinous old houses—these Romans, sceptical, intellectual, calm and industrious, excellent husbands and passionate lovers, assuredly they do not sleep. And above all, the

women—Neapolitan or Roman, Italian or foreign—who walk, chatter, gossip, love or permit love, they are not sleeping, either. The women never sleep—even at night! Rome is ever vigilant, though she may seem somnolent; she is so great, so complex, so mystical and so powerful that, as I lean here gazing upon her, she terrifies me as might some infernal machine!

“And what dreams she encourages, deceiver that she is! She receives you with the affected severity of an amorous mistress who awaits you; you open your arms, you smile! I, too, dreamed of her love. And after years of torment, of suffering, of disillusion, I learned many things: that I was too frank to succeed in politics, too ugly to please the women, too feeble to devote myself to science, too abrupt to succeed in diplomacy. I learned also this truth, as glaring as the sun: Rome yields herself to no one!”

“And what must one do?” Sangiorgio asked, almost trembling.

“Conquer her!”

And Giustini made a sweeping gesture toward the city.

“Conquer her! Away with the mediocre, the cowardly, the weak ones, like myself! Rome neither combats you nor repels you; her power lies in a virtue almost divine—indifference! You may struggle, cry out, howl with grief; she will not be moved, for you are only an imperceptible atom borne along on the wings of the whirlwind. She preserves the immovable calm, imperturbable serenity and inexorable heart of *the woman who*

does not know how to love, but who has seen everything and knows everything. Her soft and feverish sirocco unsettles the nerves, weakens the character, arouses internal revolt, followed by intense dejection. But there must be something, some one in the world that one day will come to trouble that serenity. He that would conquer Rome—be it for a decade, a year, or a month—must dominate her, take her by storm, conquer her, and avenge the thousands of dead, wounded, and weak ones who have touched her walls without being able to subjugate her Ah! such a man must have a heart of steel and an iron will; he must be young, healthy, robust, audacious, without weakness and without affection; he must devote himself absolutely to that unique ideal, that incomparable object Yes, some one must conquer the superb city of Rome!"

"I will!" said Francesco Sangiorgio.

CHAPTER VI

SANGIORGIO BEGINS THE CONFLICT

THE Minister had occupied the floor for an hour. He spoke quietly and modestly, without straining for any oratorical effects, of various things in their regular order, as they presented themselves to his clear, logical mind

His discourse was interlarded with numerous quotations of figures and technicalities. His style was methodical, and his remarks were made in a mild and somewhat familiar tone, but were clearly audible in the silence of the Chamber. His tone was almost as confidential as if he were speaking in a Cabinet council; the parliamentary accent was altogether lacking. Occasionally he drew forth a large silk handkerchief, checked in red and black

In that short, stout little man dressed in plain black, his placid face framed in English side-whiskers, was embodied the untiring worker, the model servant of the public, who passed twelve hours a day at his desk, piled high with documents—reading, writing, inspecting registers, advising with his chief assistants and with general directors.

The members listened abstractedly. His friends were sure of him, and even his adversaries recognized his superiority, thus rendering his triumph more complete.

In observing him, one could understand that his passion for figures prevented him from liking politics.

The atmosphere of the hall was stifling, because of the waves of hot air coming from the stoves. It was one of the three cold days of that Roman winter, and outside blew a dry, sharp wind, cutting and lashing.

The Speaker, a handsome man of fifty, had enveloped his legs in a blue velvet covering, lined with fur, and while lending half an ear to the Minister, he allowed his gaze to wander to the galleries, as if he sought a familiar face. The secretaries sat motionless at his right and left; Palucci, a tall fellow, strong and muscular, with a shaggy leonine mane, whispered to the handsome Sangarzia, who only nodded, being accustomed to patient silence. Varrini, the agreeable and intelligent Calabrian, with an expression that suggested a sly mouse, was writing letters.

The chair of Bulgaro, the Neapolitan deputy, creaked under his great weight, as he moved restlessly, without attempting to hide the fact that he was bored.

There was now continual going and coming of deputies making their way to talk to the Speaker, to joke with the secretaries, or to take a turn in the hall of the Lost Footsteps, returning after a time to their places.

The Minister was speaking to-day on a very serious matter, and both sides, friends and adversaries, were obliged to listen to him.

The members of the Right, a group of elderly deputies, appeared resigned, realizing that the victory was

already gained, and they listened with the air of veterans faithful at the post of duty.

The Extreme Left was indifferent, because it disdained all economic-administrative questions, and reserved its interruptions for political discussions pure and simple. One member of this small phalanx slept peacefully, his face hidden by one of his hands; another dozed openly, without pretense at merely assuming an attitude of deep thought

The members of the Center were the only ones that really paid attention to the speaker; those were eager pupils, who drank devotedly the words of wisdom of their master.

But the whole Chamber, Speaker, secretaries, committees and deputies, was influenced by the overheated atmosphere of that tightly-closed room, and the silence broken only by the calm voice of the Minister.

There were numerous spectators that day; the cold without had probably induced the ladies to enter the gallery and rest awhile in their reserved chairs, where they sat with cloaks thrown open and hands tucked in their muffs, their cheeks rosy from the heat of the hall.

The public gallery, too, was crowded: there were the weary faces of idlers, the anxious countenances of petitioners seeking the cousin of the friend of a deputy, and lazy saunterers who had gone up there merely to get warm.

The press gallery was full; those representing the Opposition had already made a good-natured attack, and the Ministerialists had been preaching for a week about

the expected address of the Minister of Finance. All sat calm and unruffled, save Gennaro Casale, an impetuous Neapolitan publicist, and an enemy to all governments, who cried:

"Gentlemen, this exposé is a ministerial disloyalty!"

In the diplomatic gallery, leaning against the blue velvet railing, sat the graceful Countess Beatrice di Santaninfa, with a dreamy look in her large, soft eyes that showed she was not listening to the Minister's remarks.

When, at half-past four, the orator had finished his speech, a general movement of admiration was visible throughout the Chamber. The Minister quietly gathered his documents and placed them in a large portfolio, while a throng of his fellow-members hastened forward to shake hands with him and congratulate him. One of his predecessors in the Department of Finance descended from the benches of the Right to compliment the stout little man with the round head. After a moment or two of noise and confusion, the Speaker's voice rose clear and distinct above the hum:

"Gentlemen, I ask for silence. The Honorable Sangiorgio has the floor."

"Who? Who?" was heard from all sides.

The Speaker repeated:

"I ask for silence. The Honorable Sangiorgio has the floor."

The eyes of all the members were turned curiously upon the newcomer, whom no one knew. He stood erect and calm, waiting for the opportunity to speak, standing at the head of the flight of steps, that he might be seen

by all. He looked unusually tall, because he held himself upright and his figure was robust. He was not handsome, but his head showed all the characteristics of strength: his hair grew thick upon a low brow, his nose was aquiline, his moustache was heavy, and his chin was firm and self-willed. No one thought him insignificant.

Among the drowsy members a new curiosity was awakened. Would the new member speak for or against the Minister? Was he one of those transparent flatterers who hasten to curry favor with the Government as soon as they reach the city? Or was he one of those insolent ignoramuses who babbled ridiculous criticisms, only to be suppressed by the ironical murmurs of the assemblage? He was a Southerner and a lawyer; that was all that was known about him.

The Honorable Sangiorgio began to speak slowly, in a virile and sonorous voice, which filled the great hall and drew from the auditors an involuntary sigh of relief.

The ladies, who had been more than half asleep, were now fully awake, and they leaned forward in coquettish poses, to listen. The press gallery, from which the reporters had been departing, gradually filled up again as the surprised journalists paused to listen to the new man.

Sangiorgio began with an exordium full of deference for the illustrious man that directed Italy's financial affairs, and his eulogy had no savor of flattery, but was kept well within the bounds of good taste.

He made a brief allusion to his own youth, to the ob-

scurity of his early life, passed in a humble province, but with eyes ever fixed upon Rome, the compelling and all-powerful. He lauded politics, saying that it was greater than all arts, greater than science, embodying in itself the history of human activity, as the statesman embodied the supreme type of man, apostle and workman, arm and head

A resounding *Bravo!* burst forth from the Right. Sangiorgio paused only a moment. This homage to the sublimity of the pursuit of politics had pleased the assembly.

The Minister of Finance who at first had fixed his penetrating gaze upon the young deputy with interest, now lowered his head, feeling that he was about to be bored by one of those verbose oratorical efforts that tire and embarrass the audience.

But Sangiorgio went on to explain that the period of youth passed in obscure provinces was not without value for those that wished to know the world of to-day, its sufferings and its needs. The great cities were devourers of men, exhausting strength, stifling consciences, breaking the will, drowning the memory. Who knew the true state of the provinces? Who cared about their inhabitants? It was true that once in a while some courageous soul would recite their woes in the Chamber; but these were isolated voices which, after making one despairing appeal, relapsed into silence. But that silence must be broken; the truth must be made known!

The Assembly was in an indulgent mood, the natural reaction from the effort to comprehend the preceding

speech. Sangiorgio's easy eloquence afforded relaxation to minds that had suffered a painful tension for two hours in attempting to follow the fantastic array of figures in the Minister's speech. And the contrast, at this twilight hour, between the darkness and chill of the streets and the warm, brightly lighted Chamber, put the audience in a comfortable frame of mind and awakened a vague sentiment of tenderness and generosity toward mankind. What were the crying wrongs of the provinces, then?

Sangiorgio continued, saying that his whole soul had revolted against an apparently innocent proposal made by the Minister of Finance. He had declared that, having been obliged to give several millions to the Secretary of War, he had found it necessary to economize. That was well; economy was the strength of young nations. But he had further demanded an increased tax on salt. Sangiorgio said he understood perfectly the reasons of state that made necessary an increase in taxes, but that those few additional centesimi would greatly augment the already heavy burden of the peasant.

Then the new deputy drew a vivid word-picture of the poverty of the villages, more terrible than that of the city; he cited facts, told short and pathetic stories, and described the collector of taxes as the spectral forerunner of hunger and death. He spoke of the rough nakedness of the red-soiled Basilicata, its arid mountains, from which came continual land-slides, covering the meager pastures with stones; of the distance of those

villages from all railways, and of the unwholesome plains, where engineers, switch-tenders, and station-masters shook with malarial fever.

When he spoke of his own country, so wretched and so poor, his sonorous voice grew tremulous with emotion; but he soon recovered himself and came at once to his point. The proposed additional tax on salt would be felt most seriously by the peasant class; already they used as little salt as possible in their soup, and a fresh tax would compel them to do without it altogether. And hygienic science, cruel but exact, had proved that an insufficient supply of salt was the cause of the fevers peculiar to Lombardy and Piedmont.

Sangiorgio proceeded to say that in the smaller towns the bakers always made two qualities of bread—salted bread for the rich, and tasteless and insipid for the poor. Sometimes the baker, finding salt too dear, passes over the fresh loaf a cloth soaked in sea water! In some of the poorer shops they used a coarse salt, black and dirty, fit only for cattle. Now, with the proposed tax, he said, the Government would condemn a whole class of tax-payers to intolerable privations, perhaps to a physical condition of serious menace. Millions were lavished upon the national defense and for new armories, but was it necessary to be so powerful when we were so poor? Should the Minister of War call to arms the young men of the Basilicata, no doubt he would expect them to be a band of hardy mountaineers, but he would find only pale weaklings, consumed by fever. Or—worse yet—the provinces, little by little, would become

depopulated; the peasant, driven desperate by the aridity of the soil, staggering under the burden of taxation, persecuted by man, without help or redress, will emigrate to foreign shores, preferring a new country and a strange people, whence he will nevermore return. When called to arms in case of war, the sons of the Basilicata will not answer. Vanquished by hunger and despair, they will have departed to die far from their ungrateful country!

The Honorable Francesco Sangiorgio returned to his bench and seated himself calmly.

A burst of applause struck his hearing, but he was only vaguely conscious of it, or of the confused buzzing that follows an important speech. Close beside him was a group of deputies, discussing his speech and pronouncing his name in tones of respect.

Sitting bolt upright on his bench, with eyes cast down, alone, with no friends to come and congratulate him on the success of his maiden speech, Sangiorgio yet heard the buzz of approval that swept through the whole Chamber.

The Right felt its political pride flattered; the Extreme Left fancied it had secured a strong adherent; while the economists believed that in him they would find some vague notions of agrarian socialism.

This speech, which at some other time might have passed for a mere literary effort, seemed to-day to have conveyed an important message. In the person of Sangiorgio triumphed the modest and intelligent deputies of the Basilicata, who, by a strange fatality, had always

remained in the background; in him triumphed the lawyers, who assumed to be masters of parliamentary *régime*, and in him triumphed the South, whose success in oratory had always been disputed. In short, the whole parliamentary body, in this moment of good fellowship, took the new member to its heart with almost feminine tenderness, pleased with those rounded periods so full of human sympathy and of pride.

CHAPTER VII

THE KNIGHT MEETS A SIREN

THE small-paned glass door of the reception-room on the ground floor of the House of Parliament, facing on the Villa della Missione, opened often to admit a newcomer, and with him a gust of cold air. Those that were already in the room, standing, or lounging on the divans, had their eyes fixed eagerly upon the door leading to the Chamber.

Each newcomer went straight to a large desk placed in the middle of the antechamber, and wrote on a bit of paper his own name and that of the deputy he wished to see. From this desk the uniformed ushers, their breasts covered with medals, and wearing tri-colored bands on their arms, carried these notes, five at a time, into the Chamber of Deputies. The visitor, satisfied for the moment at having at least sent in his name, would wait for a reply with an air of confident security. The ushers would return, still carrying the slips of paper. Everyone pricked up his ears.

"Who asked for the Honorable Parodi?" cried the usher.

"I!" called a voice from the crowd.

"He is not there."

"Have you looked carefully?" insisted the voice, which came apparently from an old man with a red nose and thick, purple lips.

"The Honorable Parodi is not there," repeated the usher patiently.

"But he must be there," muttered the other.

"Who asked for the Honorable Sambucetto?"

"I!" said a pale and sickly-looking young man.

"He cannot come now."

"Why cannot he come?" demanded the young man, becoming paler.

"That was all he wrote: he cannot come."

The young man went to a corner and sat down, without being able to make up his mind to depart. He grumbled menaces between his teeth, with a sullen air, and his hat drawn over his eyes.

On all the other faces was the same mingling of anxiety, despair, and fatigue. The antechamber resembled the reception-room of a celebrated physician, where patients awaiting their turn look idly about them, with indifference to everything except their own infirmities. All moral maladies were represented in this vast cold hall, contracting faces, contorting mouths, wrinkling cheeks and causing feverish spots to appear in them. All these beings, each absorbed in his own suffering, bore the marks of grief, chagrin and pain, with all the melancholy symptoms of dilated nostrils, nervous movements, involuntary frowns, pinched lips, trembling hands, sad smiles; and in each over-excited brain was a fixed idea, a single thought, ever present, ever vivid.

"Who wished to see the Honorable Morladi?" cried an usher.

"I!" responded a small, stout man.

"He begs that you will wait a short time; he is engaged with the Minister."

The stout man strutted about the room, his topcoat buttoned tight over his protruding stomach. The other expectant ones looked at him enviously: at least, *his* deputy had asked him to wait, while their own had sent them their dismissal without a word of politeness.

The restless movement in the room continued. Those who had received a definite refusal stood in undecided fashion near the outer door, pale, and lacking courage to go out again into the cold; then they made a sudden movement of resolution and departed without looking back, their backs bent and cowering under their thin coats.

Other persons entered; the ushers were kept busy going to and fro with notes, but it rained refusals.

"Who called for the Honorable Nicotera?"

"I!" answered a tall, thin man, with scraggy neck and beardless, cadaverous face.

"He begs that you will excuse him—he cannot come."

The thin man bent himself almost double over the desk, wrote a name on a slip and handed it to another usher, who soon returned crying out:

"Who asked for the Honorable Zanardelli?"

"I!" said the skeleton-like man.

"He cannot come; he is engaged with the Minister"

The persistent one, without losing patience, wrote a third name.

One deputy, more obliging than his colleagues, had come out to see the man that had called him, and con-

ducted him into another room, where sat a small group of ladies, quietly waiting in the semi-obscurity of the place. The two men walked to and fro, the constituent speaking and gesticulating with great animation, the deputy listening with downcast eyes, nodding approval at intervals.

In the large waiting-room, the anxious group had grown weary; a physical and moral lassitude discouraged them and destroyed their illusions. Several men, tired out, leaned against the wall; and the anxieties of all these people, borne in silence, seemed to create an atmosphere of oppression and sadness, and of bitter regret at having come to knock in vain at a door that never would open to them.

The gas jets were lighted, illuminating those careworn faces with cruel distinctness. Three ushers entered, and spoke simultaneously:

"Who asked for the Honorable Sella?"

"Who asked for the Honorable Bomba?"

"Who asked for the Honorable Crispi?"

"I! I! I!" breathlessly cried the skeleton-like man.

"The Honorable Sella cannot leave the session."

"The Honorable Bomba is particularly engaged in the Chamber."

"The Honorable Crispi is with the Budget Committee."

Quietly the petitioner wrote another name, and handed the paper to the usher.

"Pardon me," said the man, "but we cannot ask for the Ministers, especially the President of the Council."

"Why not?" inquired the thin man, with surprise.

"It is the rule."

Without apparent discouragement, the man wrote and handed over another name, and walked about feverishly, his tall form towering over the other persons in the room. Many of the lingerers had left the place, discouraged, walking with slow step and heads bowed in humiliation; others, following a despairing resolution, had gone to stand beside the gates of Montecitorio, intending to waylay the deputies as they came out of the Parliament House. A few of the timid ones, however, remained in the anteroom, tapping their feet impatiently on the floor.

A carriage drew up before the door, a footman sprang down, handed a note to an usher, and stood waiting, haughty and disdainful.

"Who asked for the Honorable Barbarulo?" called an usher returning from the Chamber.

"I!" again said the tall, thin man.

"He is not there."

"Has he gone away?"

"He has been dead three months."

The unhappy man was struck dumb by this last blow; he appeared lost in thought, but probably he could recall no more names, for he finally left the room with slow, sad step.

Francesco Sangiorgio appeared, crossed the hall, said a word to the waiting footman, who accompanied him to the coupé, into which he jumped, still excited with the recent applause of his speech.

"Let me congratulate you sincerely on your success!" said the Countess Elena Fiammanti, pressing his hand.

The carriage rolled away. In the antechamber the waiting ones slowly dispersed; the tired ushers rested on the empty chairs; two deputies chatted with the ladies.

A fire burned brightly on the hearth, three logs having been laid dextrously to form a triangle. Elena Fiammanti thrust away the ashes and stirred the hot coals, making them send up a cloud of sparks. Then she sank back, half reclining, in her deep chair, deftly spreading her billowing skirts.

"Do you like a fire, Sangiorgio? It must be cold down in your Basilicata."

"Very cold," he replied, seating himself in an easy chair near her. "They have great chimneys in their houses, and on the hearths they have a large bench, where the father of the family sits in winter, surrounded by his children."

"I love a fire," she said slowly, her eyes half closed, as if she were fatigued, "when I have some one to enjoy it with me. I do not like to be alone."

Her hands rested upon the arms of her chair, her head leaned against its velvet back. The lamplight drew forth scintillations from her jewels; one slender little foot tapped the dark, rich rug.

"You never are alone, I fancy."

"No, never," she replied, frankly. "I detest solitude."

"Yes, certainly," he answered, vaguely.

"No, do not say that from mere politeness. I know

that you men, when your minds are full of a great ambition or a grand passion, always seek solitude. But we women never do! If any woman ever tells you she does, do not believe her, Sangiorgio. She is simply deceiving you. All women are like me—or rather, I am like all other women in that respect. People amuse me—even a fool interests me. To-day, at the Chamber, for instance”—

“Well, for instance”— said Sangiorgio, with a half smile.

“There was a foolish creature sitting behind me in the Speaker’s gallery, who did nothing but chatter nonsense to me for an hour.”

“Did he not bore you?”

“No, indeed—he prevented me from hearing the Minister’s speech. Will you smoke?”

“Thank you, yes.”

She handed him a box of cigars. Her hands were plump, with rosy nails.

“Do you know, you spoke exceedingly well to-day, Sangiorgio?” she went on, lighting a cigarette.

Sangiorgio looked at her in silence.

“If you doubt my sincerity, buy the newspapers to-morrow morning—they will be full of you.”

“I hardly think so. The Minister is a great favorite.”

“Bah! He is like Aristides—his fellow citizens are tired of always hearing him called ‘the just.’ Do not let that quotation alarm you, Sangiorgio; I know neither Greek nor Latin; that was only a recollection belonging to my youth, when I used to read.”

"Do you not read now?" inquired Sangiorgio, surprised.

"No; books bore me now," the lady answered.

"They are useless, indeed."

A servant entered, bearing a coffee service on a lacquer tray; the tiny cups were of faintest blue transparent Japanese porcelain.

"How many lumps?" inquired Elena, lifting the silver sugar-tongs.

"Two "

While they sipped their coffee, Sangiorgio looked about the room with interest. It was not large, and it held no furniture of wood; all was soft, luxurious, yielding, with a profusion of easy-chairs, couches, low divans and taborets. Even the piano was half hidden under Turkish and Persian draperies, and on the wall hung a wonderful ancient cope of pink silk embroidered with gold.

"You will see, Sangiorgio," the lady continued, "that to-morrow many deputies will ask to be presented to you. You will taste all the sweets of success."

"And must I believe in the professed admiration of my colleagues?"

"No, my friend, but you may as well enjoy it. Many good, delightful things are false in their essence. The part of wisdom is to profit by them as much as possible, to take them as we find them, and ask nothing more."

She cast at him a swift, furtive glance. He understood her immediately, for, even in that warm and luxurious boudoir, his judgment was as calm and cool as it had been when he addressed the Parliament.

"That philosophy applies to love also," he murmured.

"Particularly to love," said Elena, quickly, letting dwell upon him her large gray eyes, which that evening had a tinge of blue. "Have you ever been in love, Sangiorgio?"

"Never seriously," he declared, "and yet"—

"Very well! When you do love, remember what I have just said. We must not demand more of love than it can give. But men are authoritative, selfish; each wishes to be the only one, and then—the woman lies! And really, love is a very ordinary sentiment; there are others far nobler and stronger. Love is only an illusion, a passing shadow, often futile."

While she gave utterance to these romantic paradoxes with a slightly pedantic air, her rosy lips smiled tenderly, *one white hand ruffled the little curls on her forehead*, the tiny foot still patted the rug, the thin black silk stocking allowing a glimpse of the pink skin through the dainty meshes of lace. Sangiorgio, now feeling much more at his ease, regarded her with a fatuous smile, which she appeared too much absorbed to notice.

"Women like to be deceived," she continued, throwing her cigarette into the fire. "Men do not know how to love, you will hear them cry, and they weep over it. And above all things they demand from them fidelity! As if men could be faithful, with their nerves, temperament, imagination! A hundred thousand lire to any one who will show me a man and a woman really faithful, absolutely faithful!"

By this time Sangiorgio had taken her little hand in

his; he softly stroked her taper fingers, sparkling with diamonds and milky opals. Presently he bent his head and kissed the round, dimpled wrist. He was no longer in awe of her; he felt as if he had known her a long time, and, while he was speculating about her, certain audacious ideas came into his mind.

Notwithstanding his outward calmness, his nerves were still stirred by his success of that day, and now in that perfumed boudoir the delicate intoxication was augmented by this alluring woman, whose apparent paradoxes were easy to read, and who plainly invited him to woo her.

To assert his growing feeling of intimacy, he would have liked to throw himself upon a sofa, to lie at full length on the rug, to toss matches into the fire, in short, to commit all the silly impertinences of an ill-bred boy. He resisted these temptations by a strong effort, but he felt himself weak before that ironic mouth, those quivering nostrils, and that straight, aquiline nose—the mingled aristocracy and coarseness of that face.

While caressing her hand, he had playfully drawn off all her rings, and now shook them lightly in the hollow of his large hand, his mind possessed with an insane desire to draw off one of her slippers, so that he might see her little foot curling itself up shyly in its black silk stocking.

"Of course, there are virtuous women," continued Elena. "No one denies that. There are cold women, who do not know how to love. I know some—not very many, but a few. Naturally, in that case, no great effort is

necessary to remain faithful. Now, Donna Angelica, the wife of the Minister, is absolutely virtuous. Do you know her, Sangiorgio?"

"Yes—that is—by sight!" he murmured. He felt embarrassed, and held the rings awkwardly, not knowing what to do with them; at last he put them on a table, without venturing to replace them on the young woman's fingers.

The cloud that had floated in his brain was suddenly dissipated, and he felt ashamed of the childish things he had wished to do. In a moment more, he would have asked Elena's pardon, but she appeared unaware of his embarrassment. Nervously she smoothed her silken draperies with a mechanical movement, drawing out a long fold toward Sangiorgio as if she wished him to take it in his hand.

"Well, what do you say to my sermon?" she inquired, smilingly

"I am an ardent disciple; I do not understand it all, but I admire it." Sangiorgio replied, now completely master of himself.

"I will give you some music—you will understand that," said the lady, rising suddenly. "You may smoke, sleep, or read; if you do not listen to the music I shall not care. I like to make music for myself"

The next moment a delicate yet penetrating voice began the first strains of Tosti's *Ave Maria*.

Sangiorgio was thrilled and surprised. Indeed, Elena's voice was always a surprise, because it did not seem to belong to her; or perhaps one should say it completed

her and revealed her true character. She had a rich, warm contralto, at times a trifle harsh, but with passionate accents, amorous quivers, cries of jealousy, violent ecstasy. Then came tones of strange softness and extraordinary purity, of a tenderness almost virginal. She revealed a delicacy of ideal, a harmonious transfiguration of ardor, an indefinite, vague, but exquisite mystery.

She sang with her head slightly raised; her languorous eyelids cast shadows on her cheeks, her lips were half open, and her white throat swelled under her jeweled collar. Her agile hands flew over the keyboard, light as two white doves. A new serenity, a tender peace filled the boudoir, a soothing caress that seemed to touch the furniture and the ornaments, tempering their former seductiveness. She sang a melancholy romance by Schumann, which sounded like a mingling of sighs and tears:

Va, prends courage, cœur souffrant!

At the end of this triumphal day, Sangiorgio listened pensively, his heart filled with a new and sad emotion.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ADVENTURE OF THE MASKED BALL

THE night of the last masked ball of the season had come. It was held at the Theater Costanzi. All the unimportant people, for whom one masked ball was the extent of their season's gayety—students who had still ten lire in pocket, clerks, delighted to indulge in this mild orgy; book-keepers, whose ledgers would be closed until the next day; young lawyers, budding physicians—all these, and many others, passed through the grand entrance about six o'clock in the evening.

In the corridor on the ground floor the ushers were rushing here and there, almost losing their heads with trying to check the topcoats and mantles, to hang up in safety the accumulating veils, scarfs, canes, and shawls. The crowd launched itself into the vast ballroom, and began that circular promenade characteristic of all Roman public balls.

A rollicking band of twenty-four young men, disguised as *polichinelles*, raced about hither and thither, each holding fast the tail of the white blouse of the man in front of him, and all laughing and singing at the top of their lungs.

In the middle of the hall, in a wide, cleared space, stood a group of youths and girls, the latter dressed in

short white blouses, held in at the waist by pink or blue sashes; each girl wore a baby's white cap, and carried an infant's rattle in her hand. They remained close to their youthful escorts all the evening.

The orchestra was placed on a small stage, behind a playing fountain, and as soon as the first strains of a waltz or a polka were heard, these couples began to whirl with a business-like gravity, marking the time with great precision, avoiding collisions, dancing conscientiously.

When the music stopped, they ceased dancing abruptly, as if surprised; each cavalier offered an arm to his partner, and without exchanging a word, these young couples resumed the promenade with an air of great dignity. At the next call of the music, they began a new dance, with an unflagging zeal that drew forth admiration from the ranks of spectators, who stood three deep around the dancers.

Three girls, attired in black, with white aprons and enormous muslin caps, walked about arm-in-arm, waving their black-gloved hands and coquetting with everyone.

In a box on the second tier sat a person in a red domino, with an odd head-dress like a cock's comb. She was alone, and sat motionless, her red arms leaning on the velvet railing. Other dominoes, elegant and mysterious, appeared here and there; one was strikingly tall and graceful, in pale blue satin, accompanied by a friend in black satin, whose face was hidden under a thick lace veil.

One opulent lady permitted her flowing domino to

open and reveal a rich ball gown of cream-colored brocade embroidered with gold.

But the majority of the merry-makers were good, middle-class families—fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters, who had come there dressed as for an evening promenade, in dark gowns, simple hats and thread gloves. These excellent people felt perfectly at home, and stopped to chat and jest with one another with the good humor and equanimity of the Roman people, who are easily entertained.

The crowd was densest in front of the boxes occupied by the Hunt Club, whose members, in full evening dress, with white cravats, called out jests and questions to the passing masks, and kept up a ceaseless hubbub.

When Francesco Sangiorgio appeared in the hall it was half-past eleven. A feminine form, attired in Turkish draperies, her head and face wrapped in a white veil, glided to his side. A soft voice said:

"Ah, here is the charming Sangiorgio! Why do you look so sad, Signor?"

"Because I do not recognize you, dear lady!"

"You do not know me—you must not know me—you never will know me! I know why you are sad. Let me whisper it in your ear: you are in love!"

"Yes, with you, my charmer!"

"What nonsense! Ha! Ha! You are altogether too gallant, Signor! That is not the custom here. Be rude and brusque—your reputation demands it. But hark!—Ferrante is no longer a candidate for the Budget Com-

mittee. You are being discussed for membership. Be prudent! I warn you!"

Sangiorgio stood still, astonished. The mask slipped away, and disappeared in the crowd.

The news surprised him greatly, he had not expected this. So far, his famous speech had brought no particular results. He had had a flattering interview with one of the leaders of the Right, Mario Tasca, the cold and polished orator, of moderate socialistic views, the politician who had caused his own party to lose because of his indecision at a critical period.

The new deputy had met other dignitaries and had been politely greeted and congratulated; the Minister, in replying to Sangiorgio's plea, had rendered all honor to his adversary, but had insisted on presenting his motion, and the Chamber had voted in favor of it by a large majority. No one ever remembered his speech now, apparently. The Honorable Dalma, with his poetic parliamentary cynicism, had said to him: "In politics all is soon forgotten."

In the vestibule, many couples were strolling about, arm-in-arm, chatting and laughing; young men were making important financial combinations in organizing supper parties, solitary dominoes wandered to and fro, awaiting the chimerical unknown.

Near the entrance Sangiorgio ran into the Honorable Gulli-Pausania. The Sicilian deputy was leaning against the wall, waiting for some one, correct and distinguished in his evening clothes, his pointed chestnut beard, and an opera hat, which hid a premature baldness.

"Ah, my dear Sangiorgio!" said Gulli, with a marked Sicilian accent; "What, alone, alone at a masked ball?"

"Yes, alone. I expect no one, and no one expects me. But I fancy my honorable colleague, Gulli-Pausania, cannot say the same."

"What do you suppose?" laughed Gulli; "we pass our lives in waiting for some one."

"Not always the same person, I hope."

"Oh, no! That would be too serious a business. Any news from the House?"

"None, my dear colleague. Amuse yourself well!"

"Many thanks!" said Gulli-Pausania, smiling softly.

Sangiorgio made his way to the ballroom, and stood dazzled at the spectacle.

The great hall, with its three rows of boxes, its galleries and amphitheater, was brilliantly illuminated, its white and gold decoration bathed in a soft haze. Before the stage, the fountain's high-springing jets were rose-tinted by means of an electric light

The throng was already dense, and at every moment new arrivals came from the cafés, balls, and other masquerades; it was difficult to walk, and impossible to stand still.

At first Sangiorgio could see only the back of a large man in front of him; at the right the red ear of a nurse, whose mask must have been too tight; at his left the sharp profile of a thin and pale young girl. The large man stared persistently at the occupants of the boxes.

Presently Sangiorgio managed to press forward a little till he reached the gentleman's side, and recognized

the Honorable Prince di Smirnio, who bore the title of Most Serene Highness, and was one of the wealthiest noblemen in Rome.

"Good evening, my dear colleague," said the Prince, in the peculiar drawl he always affected. "Is this your first visit to this gateway of perdition? I suppose that when you lived in the country you heard that we men of the city led wild lives, eh? Well, now you can see for yourself that we occupy ourselves in merely taking a turn about the place, with the most innocent intentions. Personally, I am looking for my wife and her sister in one of these boxes. Then, too, I like to mingle with a crowd, just to listen and learn. Everyone knows how democratic I am. I have a taste that way. You are interested in politics, are you not, my dear colleague? It is not a very amusing game—I had enough of it long ago. I belong to the party of Emilio Castelar, the Spanish Republican. Does that surprise you?"

Francesco Sangiorgio smiled, but made no reply, for he knew that the Prince preferred to talk without interruption.

"Ah, there is my wife!" he said suddenly. "Who is in that box next to hers? Oh, it is the Minister of Foreign Affairs, with his two daughters. Good night, my dear colleague."

Sangiorgio bowed, and turned away to make the grand tour of the hall, first approaching the stage, on which, at each side, were ranged little tables, surrounded by respectable families regaling themselves with lemonade, and inseparable couples, rather fond of drinking bock

beer. The deputy reached the fountain, now of an exquisite violet hue; he passed between it and the great mirror back of it and paused at the gallery occupied by the orchestra.

At that instant the musicians burst out with a popular mazurka. There was a general movement of the crowd toward the central space, in order to see the dancing. The Honorable Schuffer, sitting alone at a small table, with a glass of beer before him, fixed his little twinkling eyes on the gay maskers with a mocking smile.

"Oh, my dear friend," said he, with his soft Venetian accent, "will you take a glass of beer with me? But you are a Neapolitan—perhaps you do not like beer."

"I thank you a thousand times, Signor! I will not take anything just now, for I have only just come."

"I have been here an hour, being amused with having my sides punched, my feet trodden, and hustled about in every direction. I took refuge here in order to be quiet—you know that I am likely to get into trouble."

Sangiorgio smiled; the Honorable Schuffer, notwithstanding his mild air, had already had several quarrels. By a strange fatality, he could go nowhere without getting into some dispute or imbroglio, so that the Chamber had been obliged, more than once, to give legal authorization for actions against him.

"I learned to drink beer in Japan," he went on. "Ah, that is a great country, my dear fellow! I never had trouble with anyone there, I assure you" He added in a lower tone, as if struck by a sudden thought: "You

are Ministerial—shall you vote those millions for the Minister of War?”

“Shall you?” Sangiorgio rejoined quickly.

“Shall I?” Schuffer replied, a little disconcerted, “well, I don’t know just yet. We must talk it over, and come to an understanding. It is a serious matter. War devours the substance of a nation.”

“I ask nothing better; we will discuss this again. Good night, my friend!”

The reckless strains of the mazurka had lent new animation to the ball. Everyone was dancing. A little woman, dressed as an officer of *bersaglieri*, with her hat tilted over one ear, her bare arms emerging from the gold fringe of her epaulettes, and wearing tight knee breeches, danced with a pretty girl disguised as Mephistopheles. Both were as serious as possible, and drove away anyone that tried to separate them.

The boxes had now filled up with ladies in full evening toilet, in one of the proscenium boxes sat the delicate Florentine beauty, Elsa Bellini, wife of the actor Novelli, and the luxuriant blond tresses of Lalla Terziani. Their companions were the little Prince de Nerola, the new deputy from the Abruzzi, and their husbands, Novelli and Terziani.

“Sangiorgio!” called the little Prince, leaning over the railing of the box.

“Well, my dear colleague?” said Sangiorgio, looking up at the Prince

“If you see Sangarzia anywhere, will you be kind enough to tell him I am here. By the way, do you know

who will be elected to fill the vacancy on the Budget Committee, the day after to-morrow?"

"Ferrante, naturally."

"I think not!" said the Prince, smiling maliciously

As Sangiorgio moved away, he caught the words "Clever young fellow"—"Brilliant Southerner."

He set out to find Sangarzia in one of the boxes

In a box on the first tier sat the two sisters Acquaviva, one the wife of the Marchese di Santa Marta, the other married to the Count Lapucci.

The Countess was a vivacious brunette, with brilliant eyes and ripe red lips, a striking contrast to her husband, who was tall, pale, taciturn, and thoughtful. He was called haughty, in spite of his socialistic opinions. The Santa Martas were entirely different; he was blond and fair, with sleepy eyes and pink cheeks; she had a mass of curls and a frank, child-like expression. The Countess Lapucci laughed; the Marchesa di Santa Marta smiled; the Count Lapucci scanned the passing faces, with hands thrust in his pockets; and Santa Marta talked loudly with the Honorable Melillo, a confirmed bachelor, although a devoted admirer of the fair sex. He made a friendly sign to Sangiorgio, and the young deputy fancied he might be speaking favorably of him to Santa Marta.

In the adjoining box, the wife of the Secretary-General of Finance arrived from a reception at the Quirinal. She was a slender, supple Piedmontese, with an interesting though pale face. Her neck was covered with jewels, and she drew off her long gloves with a quick, nervous

movement. The Honorable Pasta, the celebrated lawyer, with shaven lips and gray side-whiskers, murmured in her ear little stories that made her smile. The Honorable Cimbeo, the political journalist, gazed absently through his spectacles, while his cravat crept up his collar till it nearly touched his ears. The Secretary-General, a short, bald man, with a bristling moustache, preserved a solemn, unbroken silence. When Sangiorgio passed, he bowed impressively, with an air of sympathy and gratitude, almost of affection—the salute he reserved for those who pleased him by attacking the Minister of Finance.

“Where can Sangarzia be?” thought Sangiorgio, making his way with difficulty through the crowd.

The Baroness Noir was enthroned in her box, her serpentine form arrayed in a strange robe of changeable silk, embroidered with tulips and scarlet poppies. Her husband remained in the rear of the box, with the gravity of a diplomatist awaiting an appointment; but the Honorable di San Demetrio, a future Minister of Foreign Affairs, occupied a seat well toward the front, in a strong light. Beside him sat the Honorable di Campofranco, a cold and stiff Sicilian, son of the most influential woman politician of the time, the Princess di Campofranco.

The Honorable di San Demetrio was speaking, perhaps explaining some points of his speech on the Budget, and the little Baroness listened with interest, sometimes giving his fingers a light tap with her fan.

Sangiorgio halted for a moment before this box. He

felt tired; the lights dazzled him, and the heavy, perfumed air was oppressive.

"Sangiorgio!" called San Demetrio from the box.

He started, as if from a dream.

"Do you know whether the Honorable Massari is registered to speak in the discussion on the Budget?"

"No, he is not registered."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Thank you—a thousand pardons for troubling you!"

He resumed his seat, comforted by the thought that he would have one adversary the less to answer. Sangiorgio still leaned against the wall, closing his eyes to shut out the glare of light.

Seymour and Marchetti, arm-in-arm, stopped near him; the two apostles of social science—Seymour, dark and thin, with an energetic British chin, Marchetti with rosy face, chestnut hair, and bright eyes.

"Are you bored, Sangiorgio?" Seymour asked.

"A little. I am tired."

"Were you at the session of the committee this evening?"

"No. What was done there?"

"Nothing. No one does any work. Why don't you have your speech printed, Sangiorgio?"

"What would be the use?" said Francesco, with an accent of resignation. "I shall return to the charge, however—when they begin to discuss the Agricultural Budget," he added, standing erect, as if revived.

The orchestra played the prelude to Strauss's waltz,

Le Salut à La Jow; the assembly thronged the corridors; the deputies separated; Sangiorgio remained alone.

The ladies in the boxes gazed down at the ballroom floor, envying the little dancers enjoying themselves below, while social etiquette kept them in the boxes, regretfully listening to the entrancing strains of the music.

A fresh group entered—several ladies who had been at a ball given by the Baron Huffer; they considerably remained standing a few minutes, that all might see the splendor of their gowns.

The little Prince di Nerola was now in the box of his cousin, the Countess di Genzano, an imposing Titian blonde; behind them showed the classic and noble profile of the Minister of Justice, the inflexible and gallant magistrate, as unchanging in his inflexibility as in his gallantry.

Sangiorgio shook off the fit of dullness into which he had fallen, and resumed his search for Sangarzia. He looked intently into one box after another, and at last discovered him on the second tier, near the royal box. Near the railing sat a woman of strikingly elegant appearance, in a domino of black satin, her head covered with a black lace mantilla caught up with a cluster of red carnations. Next to her was the Honorable Valitutti, a rich Calabrian, with the olive skin and jet-black beard of an Arab. Toward the middle of the box sat the Honorable Fraccacreta, one of the richest cereal merchants from the Puglia district; next to him was the Honorable Sangarzia, the sympathetic Sicilian, the accomplished swordsman, the gallant gentleman beloved by all.

"I wonder who is the fair unknown," murmured Sangiorgio, as he mounted to the second tier.

A lady, vexed at not being allowed to dance, was sweeping down the stairway in very bad humor, on the way to her carriage. She let the train of her gown drag its full length over the floor, and kept her lips pressed together with the sulky expression of a woman to whom something has been denied. She was followed by her husband and her favored admirer, each wearing the relieved look of men who have got through with a boring evening and hope soon to be able to go to bed.

Five black dominoes who had passed the whole evening in a box without speaking or moving, like a group of conspirators, now descended the stairs on the arms of five young men, also silent; the lugubrious little procession might have been on the way to a funeral banquet. Behind them came the Honorable Carrusio, a little deputy with a head as smooth as a billiard-ball, and an absurdly long black imperial, which gave a grotesque appearance to his round and somewhat boyish face.

"Excuse me, my dear colleague," said he, stopping Sangiorgio on the stairs; "Pardon my interruption, but I am very much disturbed. A relative of mine from the country made me come to this affair—something that I do not care for in the least. You can fancy how it bores me! I am so disturbed at the news I have heard—they say that the Prime Minister is very ill. Is it true?"

"Not at all, not at all!" Sangiorgio replied, smiling. "Only a little touch of gout, I believe."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I went to inquire for him in person, my dear Signor."

"Ah, I thank you, my dear colleague! I was fortunate to meet you—you have relieved me from a great anxiety. If the Prime Minister were really seriously ill, only fancy what trouble it would cause! Suppose he should die—what would happen?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Sangiorgio, still smiling at the earnestness of the little man.

"Yours to command, dear colleague! I feel quite reassured—a thousand thanks! Call upon me at any time—I am always at your service. I could not have met you more opportunely. Good night!"

"Good night! Rest assured—the Prime Minister will be quite well to-morrow."

"Thank you again—thank you!"

Sangiorgio tapped gently at the door of Number 15. Fraccacreta's voice said, "Come in!"

Sangiorgio half opened the door, saying:

"Pardon me, gentlemen! I am searching for the Honorable Sangarzia."

"Here I am, Signor"

The two men left the box; the black domino with the carnations did not even turn her head.

"The Prince di Nerola wishes to speak to you, my dear colleague."

"Oh, Sangiorgio, you and the Prince could not have done me a greater service! I really did not know how to get away gracefully. Where is he?"

"In the Countess di Genzano's box, on the first tier."

"Let us go at once."

Sangarzia reëntered the box, took his topcoat, bowed to the lady, shook hands with the two men, and followed Sangiorgio down the stairs.

"What luck!" he said. "The lady was very much bored, and wished to dance. Will you come into the Countess's box with me?"

"I do not know her."

At that moment a feminine form slipped out of a box on the first tier, attired in a Turkish costume, with head and face concealed beneath the folds of a white veil. She approached Sangiorgio.

"Come with me!" she murmured to him caressingly.

"No need to wish you good luck!" whispered Sangarzia laughingly to Francesco, as he left him.

"Come with me!" repeated the veiled lady, laying her hand on Sangiorgio's arm.

It was almost three o'clock in the morning. The dressing-rooms were full of people getting into their topcoats or wrapping themselves in mantles, with the weary air of mountebanks who, having finished their tumbling in the public square, put on old coats over their spangled satin jackets.

"Come quickly!" said the lady impatiently, as Sangiorgio was putting on his topcoat.

When they reached the street, she found her own carriage at once, and, with an apprehensive glance to right and left, jumped in, almost dragging the deputy in after her.

"Home!" she said to the coachman.

As soon as she was fairly seated, she drew down the

blinds, took off her veil and threw it on the seat in front of her, she then removed her Oriental robe, pulling out pins and tearing the material, and wrapped herself in a great fur cloak which she took from the opposite seat. Sangiorgio assisted her in silence. She gazed out at the street a moment.

"Ah, the moon is shining!" she murmured sweetly.

She tapped on the little window to give an order to the coachman, who drew up immediately in the Piazza Barberini. She descended quickly, resuming her white veil.

"Go home!" said she to the coachman. "Tell Carolina she may go to bed now. I have my keys."

They were left alone. The fountain showered brilliant jewels in the silvery light of the moon.

"Shall we walk a little?" said the lady. "It was stifling in that ballroom."

Sangiorgio offered his arm, resolved to show no surprise, whatever happened. They turned into the Via Sistina, that great thoroughfare so aristocratic by day and so gloomy at night.

The lady drew closer to her escort, as if both cold and timid, as if she were pretending to be a little creature seeking his protection, although she was a commanding figure in her long black mantle, her eyes sparkling behind the thin white veil. Those eyes had a strong magnetic fascination.

Again Sangiorgio felt himself under the same spell she had cast over him in her boudoir, when she had mocked at love. But this time the charm was deeper and keener,

with no mingling of sweetness; rather, it was a possession, an inebriation.

"How still it is!" she said in a trembling whisper, which stirred Sangiorgio's being to the heart.

"Speak again!" he murmured; "say something more!"

"What shall I say?" the lady whispered again, leaning against his shoulder.

"Whatever you will—your voice is so sweet!"

Elena Fiammanti made no reply. They had wandered to the square before the Trinità de' Monti. The obelisk towered high in the bright moonlight, throwing a long shadow across the façade of the church.

They leaned on the parapet overlooking the terrace, and contemplated Rome bathed in a luminous haze which appeared to be a continuation of the sky, a veil descending from heaven, enveloping houses, steeples, domes, and all the wondrous city.

"We can see nothing clearly. What a pity!" said Elena.

Again she took the arm of her companion, and reconducted him to the little stairway of the Trinità, near the entrance to the convent.

"Shall we go in?" she asked, pointing to the iron chain across the door. "We are two frozen pilgrims begging for hospitality."

She laughed, showing the beautiful white teeth that made her mouth irresistible. She never smiled, but always laughed.

From the point where they now stood, nothing was visible in front of them but that limitless, milky-white,

silvery haze. At the right, they perceived the gas-jets still burning in the Via Condotti; below them extended the Piazza di Spagna, with all its imposing architectural beauties.

"Come, let us go," said Elena.

He allowed her to guide him; this first romantic adventure gave him inexpressible delight. This woman—a lady, notwithstanding her audacity and the lightness of her behavior—embodied all the ideals and desires of a strong provincial man, dreamy, imaginative, but chaste and serious. This was a real love romance, into which he had been led by this perfumed beauty, wrapped in furs, with sparkling diamonds, who allured him by her personal charm, and by all that she represented. In the overthrow of his will power and the intoxication of the moment, he said to himself that this was only a passing caprice, and his moral resolution weakened under the new triumph of his vanity; charmed and flattered, he yielded to the delight of his conquest.

They descended the steps in the opalescent moonlight that bathed the stones of the ancient city. On the last step, Elena withdrew her arm from Sangiorgio's, and sat down. She now looked small and dark, leaning forward on the step, her head resting on her clasped hands and her elbows on her knees, her eyes fixed on the beautiful Bernini fountain, with brimming bowl. Sangiorgio stood beside her, filled with a sense of masculine pride, which was perceptible through his air of lover-like submission.

Elena appeared tired, as she still sat there, a dark spot

in the moonlight, a mass of black draperies, within which, perhaps, throbbed an anxious soul, a troubled heart. The man appeared to tower over her in domination.

"Do you admire this fountain?" she asked, raising her head.

"Very much; it is beautiful."

"Yes, it is. Why do you not sit here beside me?"

She did not look up at him, but seemed to be addressing the rippling waters of the fountain. He sat down at her side.

"Have you no cigars? Won't you smoke a little?"

"I am sorry I have no cigarettes for you."

"Never mind that—you must smoke."

He lighted a cigar, and she inhaled its aroma.

"What cigar is that?"

"A Minghetti."

"It smells good," she observed.

She followed with her eyes the blue smoke that rose in the air.

A closed carriage emerged from the Via di Due Macci, passed them rapidly, and disappeared in the Via Babuino.

"They must be coming from the ball," said Sangiorgio.

"What a tiresome affair that was!" whispered Elena tenderly.

"Yes," replied Sangiorgio to that sweet whisper, which gave him a pleasure that was almost pain.

Suddenly she rose to her feet, as if propelled by a spring.

"I am cold—very cold. Let us go!" she said abruptly.

She wrapped herself closely in her fur robe, and drew him toward the Via Propaganda.

He tossed away his cigar, and suddenly felt that the lady's mood had changed; that she was ready to quit him, perhaps regretting her momentary caprice. But he remained proudly silent. Could anyone count on a woman's caprice? He shrugged his shoulders, laughing internally at his own naiveté, which had led him into trusting for a moment in one of these frivolous beings.

Elena, too, was silent; she walked swiftly, as if she were indeed cold; she looked at the ground and did not address her companion, who respected her silence, resolved to follow this adventure to the end, in spite of the blow given to his self-esteem. When they reached the corner of the Via di Due Macelli, she suddenly turned into the Via Angelo Custode.

"I live here," said Sangiorgio at a venture.

"Where?" she exclaimed, stopping short.

"At Number Fifty."

"Do you live alone?"

"Yes, alone."

"Let us go up," she said, crossing the street. "I will warm myself at your fire."

"I have no fire."

"Then I will warm myself by playing the piano."

"I have no piano either."

"That doesn't matter!" was her only reply.

Two days later, Francesco Sangiorgio was elected a member of the Budget Committee.

CHAPTER IX

A LADY AND A CHALLENGE

LITTLE, idle, feminine hands, daintily gloved, amiably but rather listlessly applauded the brilliant finale of the pianist, a thin, dark, shabby man who disappeared behind the piano

"What expression!" exclaimed the wife of a deputy from Puglia, a stout person with a mass of black frizzes on her red and shining forehead.

"Ah, delicious!" murmured Signora di Bertrand, the wife of a well known functionary, a delicate Piedmontese, with a Madonna-like face framed in the high collar of a brocade mantle embroidered with gold.

From group to group, from the ladies on the divans, in the easy-chairs, under the palms, and near the cabinets heaped with bric-à-brac, swept a wave of enthusiasm. Even those who only stood at the threshold of the Ministerial drawing-room nodded their heads in sympathy with the general movement of admiration. Only his Highness, the Egyptian Prince, reclining in an easy-chair, remained calm in his impassive Oriental obesity, with his sallow face, beard of a nondescript color, his great eyes half closed under a red fez, perhaps dreaming of the dramatic melodies of the Aida, who had been one of the glories of his reign.

The feminine chatter began again, louder than ever,

and Donna Luisa Catalani, the hostess, wife of the Minister, who had snatched a moment's rest during the music, resumed her bows and smiles and curtsies. Her white gown, her diamond earrings, her little head, piquant face and original coiffure, appeared to be everywhere at once, so that one fancied there were ten Luisa Catalanis.

"These afternoon concerts are so tiresome!" languidly remarked the Countess Schwartz, a tall, thin woman, with pale face and fringed hair, who slightly resembled Sarah Bernhardt. Ensconced in an armchair, shivering in her furs like a chilled bird, she barely moved her lips in sipping her tea.

"Luisa is made of steel!" murmured Signora Gallenga, wife of the Secretary-General of Finance, coughing slightly and elevating her eyebrows, slanted like those of a Chinese. "She endures what I could not; fortunately, I am not obliged to receive all the world. Were you at the Chamber to-day, Countess?"

"I never go there."

Signora Gallenga suddenly understood that her question was lacking in tact. Count Schwartz had succeeded in being elected to a provincial councilorship, but could not obtain the office of deputy.

"I was there," said Signora Mattei, wife of another secretary-general, a Florentine brunette wearing a large black hat loaded with red poppies. "It was a very interesting session."

"And I was not there—what a pity!" exclaimed Signora Gallenga. "Did you speak to Sangiorgio?"

"Yes, I did," said the coquettish Florentine, smiling.

A sibilant "Sh! sh!" ran through the room. A stout lady with a double chin, tightly encased in a cuirass-like bodice of red satin, and wearing a good-humored smile on her pasty face, began to sing one of Tosti's emotional romances. She had thrown back her mantle from her shoulders, and with hands tucked in her muff, and veil slightly lifted, she sang, with complete serenity and lack of feeling, the expressive music of the Abruzzian master.

Luisa Catalani, standing, encircled by fifty invited guests, seated, listened politely, although her mind was distracted by the arrival of several ladies, who were waiting in the anteroom for the conclusion of the song.

This reception was the most important of the season; the temperature of the drawing-room was like that of a hothouse, with the sweet, saccharine odor peculiar to a place where many women are present. Along the sides of the room, attired in severely conventional frock-coats, stood a row of public officials, bald and taciturn, who had left the Court of Accounts at half-past four; there were also treasury and ministerial officials, all of whom preserved a bureaucratic dignity. All were schooled to tireless patience and resignation, whereby they passed from one grade to the next higher, until forty years of public service permitted them to retire.

The song was finished; a sigh of relief was audible; the singer complacently accepted the offered compliments, a broad smile upon her moonlike face.

Luisa Catalani hastened to the next room to receive the latest arrivals.

"What went on at the Chamber to-day?" she inquired of a young girl, pale and blond, the daughter of a minister.

"Oh, it was atrociously hot—that is all I noticed," the young woman replied, drawing a paper fan from her pocket. "Really, I don't see how the men endure that place."

"Sangiorgio spoke well," said Signora Giroux, a little woman with white hair and a shrewd smile on her rosy lips. She was the wife of the Minister of Agriculture.

"He is a Southerner, I believe," said Luisa Catalani. "Who was in the diplomatic gallery?"

"The Countess di Santaninfa and the Countess di Malgra."

"Pretty hats?"

"Oh—so-so—not particularly," the blonde replied abstractedly.

In one corner a group of young girls chattered gayly, their loosened wraps showing their slender figures in dark, tailor-made gowns. Enrichetta Serafini, daughter of the Minister of Public Works, a vivacious brunette in fashionable mourning, talked enough for four; around her were grouped the Signorina Camilly, an Italian born in Egypt; Signorina Borla, a somewhat mature damsel, afflicted with a perennially youthful mother; Signorina Ida Fasulo, a sympathetic young creature, with large, dreamy eyes, Signorina Allievo, with a sad but pretty face; and, finally, the only sprig of aristocracy in the group—Donna Sofia di Maccaresse, blond and fair under the drooping white plumes on her hat.

"I prefer Tosti to any other composer," said Enrichetta Serafini. "He always makes me feel like weeping."

"Denza's music, too, brings tears to my eyes," observed Signorina Borla, who did not know how to sing, and was compelled always to listen to the superannuated warbling of her mother.

"And you, Sofia, what composer is your favorite?"

"Schumann," Sofia replied simply.

The others were silent a moment. They did not know Schumann's music; but Enrichetta, nervous and rattle-brained, went on:

"But the music of all these composers should be sung extremely well." Then, lowering her voice: "Did you like the singing of the lady who has just favored us?"

All the girls tittered and giggled.

"The Countess Fiammanti is called the best singer in Rome at present," remarked Signorina Camilly

The girls made no reply; Signorina Borla compressed her lips with an air of disapproval; Ida Fasulo cast a downward glance; Signorina Allievo blushed. Sofia di Maccarese alone made no sign; either she did not know or she did not trouble herself about the Countess Fiammanti.

"Is it true that she is to marry the Deputy Sangior-gio?" inquired Enrichetta.

"Well, no—I think not!" replied Signorina Camilly, with a malicious smile in her Oriental-looking eyes.

Around the group flashed one of those mute but expressive signs, to which the rules of society compel young girls to restrict themselves.

The gathering in the drawing-room had greatly increased; the air was heavy with perfumes, with the odor of tea, and of warm furs. The women were chattering in groups, with pretty movements of the head and softly modulated voices. Several ladies were talking about the Chamber, discussing gravely the merits of the Honorable Bomba, criticising the color of the carpet, ridiculing the waistcoats of the Count Lapucci, and admiring the pensive, Christ-like physiognomy of the Honorable Joanna.

Signora Gallenga, who posed as a highly intellectual person, said:

"This year the Abruzzi are the fashion in literature, and the Basilicate in politics."

The frivolous babble stopped suddenly. Signora Angelica Vargas, tall and beautiful, had entered, and crossed the room with her rhythmic step, seeking Luisa Catalani.

She was attired in black, as usual, with sparkling jet trimming on her bodice and hat.

Luisa Catalani hastened to greet her with her sweetest smile. Each bowed with great ceremony, and then a low-toned colloquy followed between the two women—the one in white, with ash-blond hair, the other in black, with rich, dark waves above her smooth brow.

The guests near them politely affected not to hear their quiet conversation. His Highness Mehemet Pacha roused himself from his torpor and contemplated that chaste countenance, whose large clear eyes reminded him of those of the women of his own land, for which, perhaps, he felt homesick.

Those brilliant, jet-black eyes threw a comprehensive glance around the apartment, and when the hostess had turned away, several other ladies approached to salute Angelica Vargas, and soon she was the center of an admiring group. Although among them were the wives of many influential politicians, pillars of the state, she, the wife of a cabinet officer of the second rank, a simple Minister of Fine Arts, seemed the most distinguished woman present, and the quiet dignity of her mien had something about it almost royal.

In order to feel the cold less keenly, while writing in his long, narrow sitting-room in the Via Angelo Custode, Sangiorgio had wrapped an old coat around his legs.

At eight o'clock the maid-of-all-work had brought him a cup of coffee while he was still in bed. Then he arose and dressed quickly, while she put the rooms in order. When her work was finished, the girl departed without a word, her face wearing the sulky scowl of ill-paid underlings who rebel at their fate.

The hasty sweeping had scattered dust everywhere; the window-curtains were yellow, and a nauseating odor of stale dirt permeated both rooms. Sangiorgio, without a glance at the depressing view of the courtyard, with its balconies full of old pots and broken kettles, began to write at a small student's table, piled high with official documents and letters from the Basilicata. He wrote on large sheets of commercial paper, dipping his pen into a cheap glass inkstand.

Toward ten o'clock he began to feel intolerably cold

in his feet and legs, and, as he had still three hours' work to do, he went to his bedroom and brought out an old coat, which he spread over his knees. This he did as mechanically as an automaton, without taking his mind from the speech he had been preparing for a week. The ardor that consumed him was expressed in the large handwriting, clear and flowing, which covered the sheets of paper; in the tension of his facial muscles, and in his absent look, lost to exterior things.

The pile of manuscript at his left increased, and he paused only to consult Parliament blue-books, to refer to a thick volume of agricultural reports, or to a soiled and torn notebook. At eleven o'clock, when he was deep in his work, he heard the sound of a key in the lock, and a woman entered very quietly, closing the door behind her.

"It is I," she said, holding a large bunch of roses against her breast. Sangiorgio raised his head, and gazed at her for an instant without recognizing her, so absorbed was his mind in his occupation.

"Am I disturbing you?" inquired Elena, in her musical voice. "Ah, yes, I do disturb you! Go on writing—stay there at your work. I was so bored at home by this gloomy rainy weather that I went out to drive; but my horse slipped down in the mud, and people were falling, too, with their shoes simply thick with mud. It was horrible, so I did not care to stay out any longer, and have come to have luncheon with you. But you are writing. Go on; I will take a book and read."

"My poor sweetheart, I have no books here that you

would like," Sangiorgio replied, without remembering to thank her for having come.

She rummaged among his papers, her daintily-gloved hands encumbered by the roses. Sangiorgio regarded her with a complacent smile. She was always very attractive, with her pouting red lips, her strangely variable eyes, her full white throat; and he felt a joyous pride to have her there near him, in his own room.

"You are right—there is nothing one can read," she laughed. "I don't care to know how much polenta the Lombards eat, nor how many potatoes the Southerners raise. That sort of thing bores me. But go on with your writing, Francesco; never mind me."

He rose, took her in his arms and kissed her eyelids through her little veil, as she liked to have him. She laughed like an eager child receiving a bonbon. Then he returned to his work, while Elena walked about the rooms to warm herself, for it was very cold, this rainy March day, in the fireless room.

"Aren't you cold, Francesco?" she inquired presently, sinking on the divan, where she contemplated curiously the profusion of tidies with which it was decorated.

"A little," he answered, without raising his head

She glanced again around the room in all its shabbiness, and comprehended the state of decent poverty in which her lover lived; she looked long at him, writing busily at the little table, so small that the least movement knocked the papers off it; and in the young woman's eyes shone a new tenderness which Francesco did not see. Twice she opened her lips to speak to him,

but remained silent. Now, leaning against the mantel-piece, she reviewed the collection of photographs, and the sacrilegious representations of the royal family.

"Francesco, have you ever had your photograph taken?" she asked presently, admiring herself in the mirror, and straightening a bow on her hat.

"Yes, once, in Naples, where I was a student," he replied, stopping to consult a blue-book.

"And have you one of the pictures now?"

"No, *of course not.*"

"I wish I had one!" she said, in the wheedling tone of a child.

"Is not the original enough for you?"

"No," Elena replied, pensively.

He rose again, and took both her hands in his, asking tenderly:

"You really love me, then?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" she sang, in three musical notes.

Francesco sat down at the table once more, and Elena approached the bedroom. She paused at the threshold, and said:

"Francesco, why were you not at the theater last night?"

"The council of the Budget Committee lasted until eleven o'clock, and after that I was tired."

"A great many visitors came to my box—Giustini, for one. Tell me, why are you so intimate with him?"

"He is useful to me," Sangiorgio answered simply, still bending over his writing.

"Oh!" After a slight pause: "Do you know, he speaks ill of you?"

"I hope so."

"It is true that he never has a good word for any but mediocrities. I believe that you will some day be a great statesman, Francesco."

"Oh, not for a very long time," he replied, jotting some figures on a slip of paper.

"Then Gallenga and Oldofredi came in for a little while, and Oldofredi made love to me!"

"Oldofredi has good taste," was the gallant reply.

Elena smiled, and entered the adjoining room, which was so shabby and ugly that she almost recoiled in disgust.

She surveyed the arabesques on the quilt, from which the servant had shaken the dust, but the huge grease-spot on the blue chair made her turn away her head, her feminine instinct of neatness offended. She moved about the room, searching for something she wanted.

On the bureau were only two empty candlesticks and a clothesbrush, neither of which was of any use to her; on the table she found two combs and a broken bottle of toilet water. The room was as bare as the abode of an anchorite.

Finally, in a corner she discovered a carafe and a drinking-glass. Delighted, she untied her cluster of flowers, slipped three or four roses into the neck of the carafe, and put another bunch in the glass, tossed a few on the quilt at the foot of the bed, and then, not knowing what to do with the remainder, she tucked two or

three under the pillow. Next she opened one of the bureau drawers, where Sangiorgio kept his gloves and cravats, and there she dropped the last of the roses.

She espied a photograph, still in its envelope, which had apparently been tossed in carelessly. it was her own! A shade of sadness passed over her face, but did not linger. Into that wretched room, with only the gray light from the dingy court, which sent up indescribably unpleasant odors, the roses now brought a breath of springtime, suggesting the sunny corner of some perfumed garden.

"I have finished," said Sangiorgio, appearing at the door.

"Then let us go to luncheon."

"Do you think we shall have finished by half-past one?"

"Why?"

"I have an appointment with a constituent."

"Oh, indeed! I think we shall finish by that time. I hope so, for I too have an appointment for two o'clock—with Oldofredi!"

"Ah!" said Sangiorgio, putting on his topcoat

"Yes. I mean to make him tell me the reason why he did not wish to marry Angelica Vargas"

"Did he ever intend to marry her?"

"Yes, but he says he refused to do so, after a time. Perhaps it was she that refused him! Nearly everyone dislikes Oldofredi Do you know him?"

"No; he does not interest me."

"You are very pale; what is the matter?"

"I don't know. Perhaps it is because I am cold"

"Well, come home with me. There is a good fire in the drawing-room, and you shall warm yourself beside it and be happy."

He followed her, without even seeing the roses.

The Honorable Oldofredi went seldom to the Parliament library; occasionally he dropped in to look for a friend, but never asked for a book or a newspaper. Some malicious tongues spread a report that he did not know how to read.

On this particular afternoon, he entered the great reading-room, and found Sangiorgio sitting behind a small mountain of books, dipping here and there into works on social science, volumes of history, statistics, and political economy. Oldofredi's face wore a sneering smile at the sight of so much industry, and he strolled aimlessly to and fro, blowing bits of tobacco out of a small amber cigarette-holder.

The Honorable Oldofredi, despite his reputation as a formidable swordsman and a Don Juan, was neither handsome nor athletic; he had a tall, shambling figure, clayey complexion, a cruel and stupid face, and all his limbs seemed as loose-jointed as those of an acrobat. His whole person, in short, was extremely disagreeable.

Sangiorgio looked at him curiously, following the movements of this grotesque and clumsy creature, whom he hated with an instinctive feeling of jealousy and envy. He watched him striding to and fro, and held his pen in the air, forgetting his volumes of statistics and his polit-

ical economy. This specimen of a Don Quixote, disliked by all his colleagues, odious to all the women, ignorant, stupid and tactless, nevertheless succeeded, in spite of these facts, in getting himself reelected, in making people talk about him, and in holding a certain place in society.

Oldofredi was a political fighter, but his duels had ceased to be a topic of conversation, for no one had dared to offend him for a long time. But he was always called upon as a second, an arbiter, or a counselor in very serious disputes, for his word was law in affairs of honor. This lent him a certain romantic prestige, ugly and vulgar though he was, and scandal-lovers said maliciously that ladies who felt their virtue weakening made a friend of this modern Roland, because he was a bug-bear to tender inclinations.

"Have you happened to see our friend Bomba, Signor Sangiorgio?" at last said Oldofredi, stopping beside the deputy's desk.

"I? No," the other replied briefly.

"Where can he be hiding himself? He is not in the Chamber; that fish of a Borgonero is making an idiotic speech down there. I have searched everywhere for Bomba. He can only be here in the library, in company with that imbecile of a Giordano Bruno. Do you believe, Sangiorgio, that such a person as Giordano Bruno ever existed?"

"I? Certainly!" was the curt reply.

Sangiorgio, impatient, measured from head to foot, with a scornful glance, this vain braggart, who tramped

about heavily, swaying his clumsy form awkwardly, and creating an irritating noise in that quiet library.

The Honorable Gasparini, the Tuscan with a white beard and a shrewd smile, who was writing in an adjoining room on the right, had already looked up impatiently once or twice, unable to continue his work because of the conversation.

Oldofredi strolled over to the open door of the room on the left, leaned against the jamb for a moment, with his hands in his pockets, and looked with a sneering smile at the Honorable Giroux, an elderly deputy, slow and serious, who had before him an ancient tome, although his expression was drowsy and his eyes were half closed. Then he returned to Sangiorgio, and said, still sneering:

"There he is—in there with Copernicus."

"Who?" said Sangiorgio, coldly.

"Giroux. It isn't enough for him to bore everyone with his own philosophical foolishness; he must go and dig up Copernicus. Bah! Giroux will be telling us next that he knew him in Turin, when he was a carbonaro!"

He burst out laughing without noticing Sangiorgio's disgusted expression, or the nervous quiver that made the pen tremble in the Southern deputy's hand.

"And Gasparini is over there, studying up English law, in order to be able to argue against Giroux to-morrow. What do you think?"

"I? Nothing."

"I am going to take Gasparini by the hand and lead him to Giroux, and bring about a reconciliation. Ben-

tham and Copernicus will bless them, and the financial situation of Italy will be just as badly off as it was before."

He made these remarks in a loud tone, as if he wished the two men to hear him.

Sangiorgio, disturbed, made a sign with his head which Oldofredi understood immediately.

"Oh, they don't hear! When Giroux is with Copernicus, he hears nothing more; and Gasparini always goes to sleep over his English laws!" He shrugged his shoulders slightly, with one of the swaggering movements that had helped to gain for him his reputation for courage.

"Who knows? They might hear you and answer you," said Sangiorgio significantly.

"Not they—they would say nothing whatever. A little unsigned letter, criticising me, might appear to-morrow morning in the journal of the Opposition—that is all. That is the custom in politics. Or they will pretend they have heard nothing—as always. You are young—that is easily seen—and you have many things to learn. Let me tell you something: in political life, never reply to a man's face. Either forget or wait!"

"But suppose they should act otherwise than as you have said," Sangiorgio replied, more coldly than before.

"Pooh! Why, my dear sir, for five years I have had the run of this palace, criticising whomsoever I chose, and saying exactly what I think of everything and everybody. Has anyone ever forbidden me to do so, or at-

tacked me to my face, like a courageous adversary? No one, I assure you, my good sir!"

"And why have they not?" inquired Sangiorgio, his eyes fixed on his paper, appearing to reflect deeply.

"Why? Because the older men have exhausted their stock of courage—if they ever had any!—and the younger have not begun to use theirs—supposing that they possess any!"

"Do you really believe that, Oldofredi?"

"Heavens! Do I believe it? The Chamber is full of cowards and sneaks!"

"No, it is not, Oldofredi!"

"Rascality, Cowardice and Company—that is the name of the organization"

"I tell you it is not, Oldofredi"

"Do I understand that you give me the lie?"

"Precisely!"

"You persist in it?"

"Absolutely!"

"You assert that the members of Parliament are neither cowards nor rascals?"

"Certainly I do"

"Very well! I live in the Via Frattina, Number Forty-six; I dine at the Colonna, and I shall be at the Apollo this evening."

"Very well."

"Good-day!"

"Good-day!"

Oldofredi made an elaborately careless gesture,

knocked the ashes off his cigarette, and went out, swinging his long arms.

Sangiorgio dipped his pen into the ink and resumed his writing. No one had overheard the conversation. Gasparini turned the leaves of the English law-books; Giroux dozed over Copernicus; and Sangiorgio took notes from a work on political economy.

CHAPTER X

ANOTHER STEP TOWARD CONQUEST

WHEN the Honorable Sangiorgio entered the Parliament café for dinner, at seven o'clock that evening, every head in the dark-red, crypt-like Egyptian room turned toward him, and his name flew from one to another.

The young deputy, after a moment of indecision, seated himself at a little vacant table. Immediately the Honorable Correr bowed to him amicably, as did the Honorable Scalatelli, a colonel of carabinieri. Meanwhile, the tall, stout Paulo continued to dispute with Berna, the little Mephistophelian deputy from Padua, who had a wicked wit and a caustic tongue.

"Is this news true—what we hear about a duel, Sangiorgio?" asked Correr in a low tone.

"Quite true," Sangiorgio replied, calmly examining the menu.

"Is it your first duel?"

"My first."

"Have you ever fenced?"

"A little."

"You have been rather rash. Oldofredi is tremendously strong."

"A duel—a duel, did you say? Who are the combatants?" cried Paulo.

"The Honorable Sangiorgio is to meet Oldofredi," Correr explained.

"By Jove! a good adversary! Oldofredi is left-handed—don't forget that, Sangiorgio."

"I was not aware of it, but I will remember it," was the cool reply.

"And how about seconds? Whom have you for seconds?" demanded the enormous Paulo, the colossus, the molossus, who grew excited at the mere idea of a duel.

"The Count di Castelforte and Rosolino Scalia. I am expecting them to dine with me," said Sangiorgio.

"Good! An excellent choice; they are sensible fellows, and will not try to patch up a reconciliation when you get on the ground."

"Was this duel inevitable?" inquired Scalatelli.

"Inevitable."

"Oldofredi is a fine swordsman. I fought with him once, years ago, and he wounded me on the wrist," the Colonel calmly explained

At that moment the Count di Castelforte and Rosolino Scalia entered, glancing about to discover their principal. The Count had an aristocratic air, with his tall figure, his dark beard streaked with silver, and his cold, impassive demeanor. Rosolino Scalia still looked like an officer in civilian dress; he had a flower in his coat, and his moustache was waxed and perfumed; he too was cold and grave. Castelforte stopped to speak to Correr and Scalatelli, while Scalia removed his topcoat.

"Well—has anything new happened?" Sangiorgio asked.

"Nothing—or almost nothing," said Scalia, in a tone of reserve.

Sangiorgio asked no more questions. The dinner began in silence, Castelforte was very stiff, Scalia serious, and Sangiorgio indifferent.

"The other seconds are Bomba and Lapucci," said Scalia at length, pouring himself some wine. "The rendezvous is appointed for half-past nine o'clock. Have you your swords, Sangiorgio?"

"Yes."

"Good!" said Castelforte. "I hope they have been newly sharpened—nothing is worse in a duel than dull swords. The conflict is prolonged, and the wounds are ridiculous."

"I gave them to Spadini himself to grind."

"Excellent!" said Scalia. "A duel should not last too long, for it easily becomes a farce. A word of advice, Sangiorgio: think of nothing, and disturb yourself about nothing, but, at the first assault, make a bold rush and press on; never mind the movements of your adversary, but throw yourself upon him; this is the best way for novices to begin."

"Lapucci has given me to understand," put in Castelforte, "that the conditions of this combat are very serious. You may not realize, Sangiorgio, that between responsible seconds these matters are of grave consideration."

"I have no desire to jest on this subject," Sangiorgio replied, taking some salad.

"So much the better. Have you a surgeon?"

"No," said Sangiorgio, beginning to feel impatient.

"Let us take Alberti—he is accustomed to these affairs. I will see him this evening."

A groom in livery, on whose cap appeared the words *Caffè di Roma* in gilt letters, now entered the restaurant, looking around to find some one. He had a note for Sangiorgio, who read it at once.

"The Speaker of the Chamber asks me to see him at the Caffè di Roma, where he will be until ten o'clock."

"See him, by all means," Castelforte advised, "but be firm, and do not allow him to change your intentions."

"Scalia! Scalia!" from another table called the huge Paulo, who was fairly stamping with impatience; "for heaven's sake, select some place for the encounter near an inn, a house, or even a cabin. Since the time when I had to bring back that poor Goffredi, wounded in the lung, and vomiting blood at every jolt during a three-hours' ride over a stony road, I have vowed never to act as second in a duel unless there was a bed to be found within fifty paces."

"Wouldn't it be better, then, to have it in a house?" Correr observed.

"No, indeed! That always brings bad luck—a duel in the house," said Scalia. "A duel in the open is much better."

The two seconds now rose, and exchanged a few parting words with their principal. The men at the other tables eyed them curiously, but the three faces were impassive. They parted with cordial bows and ceremonious handshaking.

"Good luck, colleague!" said the Honorable Correr.

"Keep cool!" added Scalatelli.

"If you think he has the evil eye, carry a bit of coral in your pocket," suggested Berna.

But, from his table, the giant Paulo called out familiarly, with a laugh:

"Good night, Sangiorgio! Good luck, old fellow—and listen!—aim at his face!"

As Sangiorgio left the restaurant, he met the reporter of a morning newspaper, who asked him for news.

"I have nothing to say," was Sangiorgio's only reply to the first question.

"But may I call at your house to-morrow morning, to know the result of the duel?" the reporter persisted.

"Via Angelo Custode, Number Fifty," Sangiorgio said, moving off abruptly.

At the Caffè di Roma, the Speaker was finishing dinner with his friend, Colonel Freitag, a stout man with a boyish face and high-pitched voice. The Speaker looked tired and bored. As soon as Sangiorgio joined them, he came straight to the point.

"Cannot this miserable affair be adjusted, my dear colleague?"

"I think not, Signor."

The Speaker made a little movement and bit his lip.

"Come, now, some misunderstanding has arisen between you and your adversary, eh? Nothing more serious, is it? You know, a duel between two deputies is a serious thing, and should not occur unless for a very grave cause."

"I assure you, Signor, that no misunderstanding exists," said Sangiorgio quietly.

"Yes, yes, I know—Oldofredi is rather free. You are young, and have taken offence at one of his jests. Take care, colleague! To-morrow morning the newspapers will be full of it, and there will be a scandal."

"I hope not, but in any event, there is no remedy."

"Some one will be sure to say that you have picked this quarrel with Oldofredi simply to make a sensation—to get yourself talked about."

And the Speaker looked sharply at Sangiorgio, but his face betrayed nothing more than an expression of mingled indifference and disdain. He decided to renounce for the present his project of reconciliation.

"What are the conditions of the duel?" he asked.

"I do not know yet, but I have a rendezvous with my seconds fixed for eleven o'clock." And Sangiorgio rose, as if to go.

"I beg that you will not talk to any reporter. A parliamentary duel is a rare morsel for them. Good luck, my dear colleague!"

Sangiorgio bowed and departed, fully understanding the meaning of the distant silence of Colonel Freitag and the coldness of the Speaker.

On reaching the street, he paused, undecided. He had agreed to meet his seconds at the Caffè Aragno, but he now felt a sudden disgust at this wandering from café to café, talking to these men apparently without families and without homes, who passed their evenings in these smoky haunts.

He was weary of the idly curious questions from persons who were totally indifferent to him. He preferred to stroll slowly up to Montecitorio, and on the way he bought some evening journals at a kiosk in the Piazza Colonna, and read them under a street-lamp.

Two or three of the journals announced the duel; one used only the initials of those concerned, and added that all attempts at reconciliation had been futile. He thrust the papers into his pocket, and paced to and fro opposite the Parliament House, awaiting the arrival of his seconds, who were then in consultation with the opposing seconds within the palace.

The windows of the Bureau of Commissions were brilliantly lighted, for the bureaux are always busy places; otherwise the square was deserted—the great somber square, without a shop to be seen.

He strode this way and that, with his hands in his pockets and head down, walking quickly because of the dampness of the night air.

The large doors of the Albergo Milano, opening on the square, had closed loudly after the arrival of the last omnibus from the railway station, and still the expected seconds had not arrived. Sangiorgio felt irritated at being observed by the deputies, now coming out of the Palace, having finished their work.

At last Castelforte and Scalia appeared at the door; the tall form of the Lombardy Count towering above the squatty little body of the Sicilian deputy. They were chatting gayly together; Sangiorgio hastened to meet them.

"I do not wish to wait for you in a café," he said, apologetically. "They are all full of people, and I do not care to have the air of posing for the gallery."

"You are quite right," said Scalia. "When a man is about to fight a duel, it is in good taste for him to keep out of sight as much as possible. There is that *poseur* of an Oldofredi, running about all the evening from one café to another, making swaggering speeches. He is now at the Apollo, challenging the admiration of everyone. Well, at last we can say that everything is arranged."

"The Acqua Acetosa, near the Porta del Popolo, is an excellent place," Castelforte added. "It is not far. The meeting is fixed for ten o'clock, and we will call for you at half-past eight."

All three turned their steps in the direction of San-giorgio's lodgings; he smoked in silence.

"Are you nervous?" Castelforte asked.

"No, not at all."

"Then try to get some sleep. Have you any brandy at home?"

"No."

"Brandy is a good thing to have. I will bring you some to-morrow. But you must try to get a good night's sleep."

"Don't disturb yourself about me. I shall sleep."

"We have not forbidden any strokes," the Count continued. "That was your wish, I believe."

"Precisely."

"I have notified Doctor Alberti," added Scalia, "and he

will be there. His experience is invaluable. Do not trouble about a carriage; we shall come in a landau. Only, be sure to be ready, for we must arrive punctually to the minute."

"How does it happen, Sangiorgio, that you never have fought a duel before?"

"Oh, we in the Basilicata do not get angry easily."

"One would not think so!" said Castleforte, laughing.

They turned in silence into the Via Angelo Custode. The three shadows moved along the deserted street; that of Castelforte lean and spectral, Scalia's stiff and solid, Sangiorgio's slender, but firm.

Alone! The candle threw a dim light over the cold, bare room, where a close air was mingled with the stale odor of cooking that mounted from the court.

Alone! He was glad of this solitude, for he felt an imperious need of complete isolation.

Since the morning he had been conscious of an ever-increasing contempt for his fellow men; the experience he was passing through embittered his soul and filled his mind with disillusion and disgust. Upon his healthy moral equilibrium, which heretofore nothing, no being, no event had ever troubled, had been precipitated, with astonishing swiftness, the most unexpected meannesses, trickery, coldness and indifference, and all within seven short hours: first, the difficulty of finding seconds against Oldofredi, who had such a reputation as a swashbuckler; then the lukewarm interest of Scalia and Castleforte, followed by advice, insinuations, tactless warnings, lugu-

brious conversations, polite but insincere remarks—the recollection of these disagreeable things passed through his mind, a revelation of the hypocrisy of mankind.

All these people—strangers, friends, enemies, admirers or detractors—judged him unfavorably: some with a pitying concern, others with spiteful irony or jealous anger—all with unmistakable contempt. His audacity in presuming to measure swords—he, the young, inexperienced newcomer—with a bully whom no one dared insult, had gained him nothing but the disdain, compassion, or jests of his colleagues. So he was glad to be alone—to compose his mind away from his mocking fellows.

Alone! No, he was not alone; something glittered on that divan. And as he approached it, candle in hand, a metallic gleam shone under the light: the two swords, newly sharpened, were to keep him company.

These, at least, would not lie to him. There they lay, always loyal, always ready to parry a mortal blow, to strike, to cut down, to kill, one in his own hand, the other in that of his adversary, blade against blade, throwing off scintillating sparks. Yes, the swords were ready.

Irresistibly drawn toward them, Sangiorgio sat down on the divan. What cared he now for reporters, deputies, seconds, friends or enemies? His whole attention was concentrated on the weapons. The result depended upon those sharp and glittering blades. The result! What result? He started, and glanced around involuntarily as if to see who had pronounced that word; but he was alone—alone with the swords.

For most men, the night before a duel is agitated and sleepless; the expectant combatant has a wife to console, a friend to communicate with, a relative to write to, a servant to instruct. He is not afraid, but in the depths of his mind there is a mingling of troubled thoughts, anxiety, and regret. In thinking of the approaching conflict, however, his disturbed mind finds distraction and a kind of exaltation.

But for Sangiorgio there was nothing of all this: he had no wife, no relatives near him, no friend, no servant—not a line to write, not a word to say, not an order to give!

He tried in vain to arouse some emotion within himself at the thought of the possible end. Who would weep if he should die to-morrow? No one—no one! he was alone—alone with the swords! And, in this crisis of bitter misanthropy, in this mental review of men and events, he thought of himself, of his great and only passion—political ambition. A wound—whether grave or slight—would do considerable damage to his reputation, and his need of political *éclat*. In case of ignominious defeat, no woman's tears, no affection of a friend, no family concern, would be his, as a consolation for such a misfortune; he would be left alone to weep over his own fate, over his lost dreams of glory and lofty ambitions, vanished in the moral and physical shame of this disaster. The sword-thrust which to-morrow might pierce his flesh, cut the muscles, or open a vein, would find also the way to his heart—that heart so cold and hard, wherein dwelt a single overwhelming passion.

The task at which he had labored so long, with the patience of an ant and an unparalleled persistence, might fall in ruins to-morrow. Of what use had been so many efforts, so many privations, so many pangs endured in silence? One stroke of the sword, and all that would become in vain. In the profound silence and absolute solitude of the night, for one moment those sabers, shining in the smoky light of the candle, made him tremble.

The seconds arrived precisely at half-past eight. Sangiorgio, his topcoat buttoned up, his tall hat resting on a table, was pale, but perfectly calm. Only a slight quiver of one corner of his mouth was visible.

"Where are the swords?" Castelforte asked.

"There they are"

The Count drew them from their scabbards, one after the other, touched the points, and tried the blades by pressing them against the floor

"Have you a silk scarf or handkerchief, or something to tie them together with?"

Sangiorgio had a scarf. Scalia put the swords in a bag, tied it around with the scarf, took up the gauntlet, and said to Castelforte:

"Shall we go?"

"Yes, let us go."

They descended the dark stairs. The coachman opened the door of the landau. Scalia threw the swords on the front seat, and the three men jumped into the carriage.

They drove through the Via di Due Macelli, where an

early florist was watering his roses, and turned into the Piazza di Spagna. A few drops struck against the carriage-windows.

"It rains," said Sangiorgio.

"That is nothing," Castelforte replied, "a duel in the rain is more dramatic."

The Via del Babuino was in process of reconstruction; piles of stones and rubbish blocked the side streets, and the entrance to the Via Vittoria was impassable, because of repairs to the drain-pipes going on.

When they reached the Piazza del Popolo, the storm increased, and the rain-drops had turned to hail, which struck the glass with a sharp rattle.

"A squall," said Scalia; "the winds are having a combat also."

The carriage stopped to take up the surgeon, who awaited the party on the steps of the Caffè dei Tre Re, his instrument-case tucked under his arm. He seated himself next to Sangiorgio, and began to talk, with great gayety and good humor, about the various duels at which he had assisted.

The landau rolled swiftly along the muddy pavement of the Flaminian Way, meeting the first car on the tramway of the Ponte Molle, which was almost empty. In the distance, the first glimpse of the country was visible; trees were outlined against the stone walls.

Then Sangiorgio, who up to that moment had remained in a sort of moral and physical stupor, awakened from it with a start; Scalia had lowered a window. He began to think and to revive. His nervous force con-

centrated itself in his hand, which clutched the tassel of the window-curtain; small flushed spots appeared on his cheeks. But his mind became wholly self-centered, and to the remarks of the surgeon and his seconds he replied only with nods of the head.

The horses trotted steadily on, puffing as they climbed the hill. The descent began at the Villa Glori, and then they accelerated their pace. The walls had disappeared; to right and left were flowery hedges; Sangiorgio thought that children ran after the carriage, offering him bunches of hawthorn. Then the hedges gave place to rows of elms, which murmured softly in the breeze.

They stopped. A sudden tremor shook Sangiorgio, and every trace of color left his face. He made a movement to alight, but Castelforte restrained him.

"Remain in the carriage with the doctor," he said. "The exact spot has not been chosen yet. Wait a little."

The seconds alighted, while their principal looked out of the window at them. They were the first to arrive. The cabin at the Acqua Acetosa appeared abandoned; the blinds were down, the doors closed. The river flowed through the green and lonely plain; in the distance a flock of sheep was grazing, under the eye of a shepherd, who sat motionless, his cap pulled over his eyes.

Castelforte and Scalia moved off, gesticulating, their well-dressed figures making a strange contrast to the surroundings of that wild spot, where the sky and the gray earth seemed all of one color, and the livid waves of the Tiber rolled slowly along. Presently they re-

turned, talking animatedly. Sangiorgio was beginning to be impatient; the carriage seemed irksome; he felt stifled.

The seconds approached; Castelforte, leaning against the door, said:

"We have found an excellent spot; the ground is a trifle spongy, but it is not slippery. We must wait to see whether the others are satisfied with it."

"Here they come!" said Sangiorgio, whose nerves were strangely irritated by his inaction.

A sound of wheels was heard; a landau approached rapidly, turned before the cabin, and drew up beside the other carriage. From it descended Oldofredi, Lapucci, and Bomba. The two latter advanced to meet Sangiorgio's seconds, while the two surgeons, after saluting each other, set their instrument-cases on the ground.

Oldofredi, standing near his carriage, his topcoat unbuttoned, smoked, and struck playfully at the horses' cruppers with his cane. Sangiorgio regarded him from the carriage, furious at his own ignorance as to the etiquette of dueling. Should he remain in the carriage still, or get out, like his adversary?

The four seconds talked and argued; in the soft, damp air, the Lombardy accent of Castelforte was clearly distinguishable, while the voices of the others were indistinct.

At last Scalia and Bomba approached their respective principals. Castelforte and Lapucci cleared the ground at the chosen spot, and traced lines with their canes. Scalia, on reaching Sangiorgio, said:

"Undress now! Leave your topcoat and hat in the carriage."

Then he took the swords and the gauntlet, and returned to the field; Bomba joined him, carrying other swords and another gauntlet.

Sangiorgio, who trembled with impatience and eagerness for the combat, removed his hat, tore off his topcoat, coat, waistcoat, and cravat, and hastened to his seconds. The clanking of the weapons as they were laid on the ground made him start. Castelforte called to him.

"Keep on your topcoat—it is cold."

Sangiorgio returned, took the coat, threw it over his shoulders, and rejoined his seconds. Castelforte and Lapucci were drawing lots for the privilege of giving the word of command and of having the choice of arms.

"Have you had a glass of brandy?" the surgeon asked of Sangiorgio.

"No."

"That is wrong; one should always take a stimulant."

"I hardly have need of it," said Sangiorgio to himself.

"I am to command the combat," Castelforte announced. "You, gentlemen, are to choose the weapons. Will you examine ours?"

"I choose the swords we brought," said Lapucci. "Here they are."

Oldofredi was coolly surveying the landscape, an anemone between his lips, his back turned to the others. Castelforte handed a sword to Sangiorgio, fastened the handle to his wrist, and led him to his place.

The two surgeons moved away about twenty paces. Scalia stood at Sangiorgio's left, and Bomba at Oldofredi's. Lapucci and Castelforte stood near the middle, one on each side, sword in hand.

Oldofredi looked more stupid and insignificant than ever, seeming not to comprehend what was taking place.

Castelforte, with his military air like that of a captain of cavalry, looked imperiously at the two adversaries.

"Gentlemen!" he began.

Sangiorgio's face flushed suddenly, Oldofredi threw away his anemone, and with a graceful movement disembarrassed himself of his topcoat.

"Gentlemen! It would be an insult to recommend to two such men as you that you comport yourselves according to the rules of courtesy. I will only request that you stop when I say 'Halt!' and not make an attack until I give the word. Now we will begin." He glanced at Lapucci, and cried:

"En garde!"

Oldofredi, with a swift movement that was hardly perceptible, advanced his right leg, bent one arm behind his body and assumed the proper position. Sangiorgio abruptly struck the attitude of guard, and extended his arm as stiffly as if it were of iron.

"A vous!" commanded Castelforte.

They sprang toward each other. Oldofredi's sword struck that of Sangiorgio, who had made a thrust at him, and it fell from his hand; but Sangiorgio had raised his arm with such force that the stroke had bewildered his enemy.

"Halt!" cried Castelforte, lowering his own sword between the two combatants. They paused, and resumed their former places.

Oldofredi, a little pale, was smiling; Sangiorgio breathed hard, like a bull that sees a red garment.

"*En garde!*" again came the command. Sangiorgio, his arm extended, the point of the sword aimed directly at Oldofredi's face, looked at his opponent with so furious and fierce a stare that Oldofredi remarked it "*A vous!*" cried Castelforte.

This time Oldofredi sprang at Sangiorgio, who received him motionless, with extended arm, without parrying; but he met the stroke with a thrust so neat and prompt that the weapon fell from the hand of his adversary, and remained hanging from his wrist.

"Halt!"

Lapucci and Bomba ran to refasten Oldofredi's sword "A fine thrust!" murmured Castelforte

Sangiorgio had recovered all his serenity. A smile of gratified pride illuminated his face. Oldofredi returned to his place, sword in hand; his face was white with rage, his brows were knit in fury.

At the next signal, he precipitated himself brutally on his enemy, without feint, or any sort of artifice of fencing, apparently intending to cut open his head. But before his weapon could reach its aim, the point of Sangiorgio's sword cut his lower lip, and cut his cheek open in an upward stroke as far as the temple.

The four seconds threw themselves between the combatants, and the surgeons ran toward them.

**THE SECONDS THREW THEMSELVES BETWEEN THE COM-
BATANTS, AND THE SURGEONS RAN TOWARD THEM**

From an Original Drawing by Arthur Crisp



The wounded man was lifted to a stretcher, surrounded by the six men; Sangiorgio remained alone, half dazed and nearly stripped, in the falling rain.

As they were passing through the Porta del Popolo, on the way home, Sangiorgio heard confusedly Castelforte say to the surgeon:

"How many stitches were you obliged to take?"

"Ten."

"How long will he be laid up?"

"About twenty days—unless fever develops."

"By Jove! what a fine stroke!" Scalia interrupted, puffing furiously at his cigar.

"And he will have a scar!" added Castelforte, laughing. "He won't forget this duel soon."

The surgeon left them at the San Giacomo hospital, after making an appointment to sign the certificate of the duel. Sangiorgio began to come out of his trance-like state.

"Are you hungry?" Scalia inquired.

"He should be, he deserves it," Castelforte interposed. Both men smiled complacently.

While they were on the dueling ground, these two seconds had not embraced their principal, through a sentiment of delicacy; but now they gave free vent to their feeling of satisfaction. All coldness and ceremony had disappeared; they looked at Sangiorgio affectionately, and spoke of him with loving pride, as of a beloved son who has successfully passed a difficult examination. Castelforte went so far as to pat his shoulder—

an unheard-of familiarity on the part of this grand seigneur. They caressed him with eyes and with voice, proud of his courage; they said the kindest things to him, all of which he received quietly.

His excited nerves were now relaxed, and he was conscious of a craving for the comforts of physical life—he wished to eat, to drink, to sleep for hours in a warm bed. He smiled proudly at his seconds, having put out of his mind all unpleasant remembrance of the duel, the gloomy *Acqua Acetosa*, and the livid face of his adversary, slashed by a wound whence the blood flowed in a crimson stream. He rested on his triumph, his face serene, his eyes radiant, his lips half open in an almost childish smile.

The luncheon at the *Caffè di Roma* was loud and gay. Castelforte or Scalia filled Sangiorgio's glass every other minute, and he ate and drank enough for four, nodding at his seconds, laughing with them at the thought of Oldofredi's anger—more bitter to him, no doubt, than the pain of the wound itself. By the time dessert arrived, their gayety knew no bounds.

"At first," said Scalia, "I feared for you, my dear friend. Your adversary was strong and courageous, and has had wide experience. You were young, without experience, and so—I felt anxious, which was very natural."

"That is more than Oldofredi was!" said Castelforte.

"He seemed to me, on the ground, to be rather inclined to trifle," Sangiorgio observed.

"Oldofredi never trifles," said Scalia sententiously.

"It is not necessary to pay any heed to his posing. I assure you that at the third attack he was furious, and he went at you, my friend, with a fixed intention to break your head. Ye gods! What a stroke!"

"What a stroke!" echoed Castleforte.

And the same complimentary phrases began anew, a little monotonous and incoherent by this time, with a hundred repetitions of the same thing, and a rehashing of the same details.

The Honorable Melillo, who had lunched at the Colonne restaurant with the Honorable Cermignani, being anxious about the fate of his colleague from the Basilicata, had come to learn what had happened. The fat Melillo, with radiant countenance, embraced Sangiorgio, while Cermignani remained standing, listening to the story of the combat in a heroic attitude, as if inspired by war-like anger.

Bencini, the old deputy of the Right, the witty and clever Catholic, who was said to fear neither God nor the devil, talked animatedly at the end of the room with Gambara, the dean of the Conservative party. Bencini, curious and audacious as a woman, advanced to compliment Sangiorgio, for he had a profound antipathy for the stupid belligerency of Oldofredi. He shook with laughter at the thought of the rage of the deputy from the Marches.

"Ah!" he cried, "that braggart Oldofredi never will boast of this duel. And you say he had to have his cheek sewn up. It's lucky this isn't midsummer—he might go mad and bite!"

Everyone laughed. Scalia bought some roses of a flower girl; Castelforte described the wonderful stroke to Gambara, who smiled amiably, with the indulgence of an old parliamentarian for hard-working and courageous young deputies.

Cermignani and Melillo laughed at Bencini's jests; and when Sangiorgio went out to get into his landau, a little triumphal procession accompanied him.

The sun had come out, dispersing the rain-clouds; the carriage stood by the curbstone, and Melillo insisted on getting into it with Sangiorgio.

As they proceeded along the Corso, they were met with bows and smiles, and friendly greetings from the throng of strollers who were taking the air while waiting for the hour for Parliament to open.

In the Piazza Colonna the Deputy Carusio stopped the carriage, embraced Sangiorgio with fervor, and declared that he intended to go immediately to the Speaker and inform him of the good news.

In the Chamber itself, the demonstration of approval was general. The Speaker maintained his usual dignity, but in his smile of greeting to Sangiorgio was something cordial and affectionate—one might say grateful.

The Honorable Freitag, with head sunk between his shoulders, his heavy body swaying like that of an elephant as he slowly paced the corridors, approached the Southern deputy, saying:

"In the face, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Signor—in the face."

Others stopped him, shook hands with him, and asked

for details of the duel. The seconds, and even Melillo, were surrounded, and questioned as to that marvelous final stroke.

Those deputies with war-like inclinations listened with sparkling eyes and exclamations of astonishment; the more peaceful remained silent, thinking of this duel with as much wonder as if it had been a tournament. The cruel ones asked for descriptions of the wound, inquired as to the quantity of blood shed, how many stitches had been taken, and how large a scar would result. Others, more circumspect, but inspired by example, frankly owned to the antipathy they felt for the noisy, stupid, boasting Oldofredi, each harboring the recollection of some rankling word, gratuitous insult, or irritating bravado, borne in silence in order to avoid a scandal.

The few that were Oldofredi's friends stood aloof, contenting themselves with refraining from any congratulations to the happy conqueror. When Lapucci and Bomba entered the Chamber, about four o'clock, no one advanced to meet them, and only a few persons made perfunctory inquiries as to Oldofredi's condition, in a tone of contemptuous pity. They felt themselves included for the time being, in the unpopularity of their principal, tossing on his bed, his head bandaged, and burning with fever.

The enthusiasm for Sangiorgio lasted all day, augmenting still more at dinner-time. Bewildered, confused, and still somewhat excited, but preserving an outward calm, he let everyone say and do whatever he

pleased, smiled on everyone, and greatly enjoyed this new popularity.

After dinner, he went to the Costanzi Theater, and occupied an orchestra chair. The opera was *Les Huguenots*, with which he was unacquainted. He listened to the music like one in a dream. Behind him, two young men were talking of the duel and pointing him out as the person who had vanquished Oldofredi. They spoke in an undertone but Sangiorgio could hear all that they said.

Between the acts, he felt suddenly the magnetic glance of a pair of eyes fixed ardently upon him. He looked up: Elena Fiammanti was in her box. Mechanically he ascended the stairs, opened her door, and in the dark shadow of the back of the box he felt two soft arms clasping his neck, while a tender voice murmured in his ear:

"Oh, Francesco, Francesco! why did you fight on my account? It was not worth the trouble!"

When the opera was over—after receiving at least a dozen visits in her box—Elena descended the stairs leaning tenderly on Sangiorgio's arm, her eyes sparkling with pride and pleasure. At the door of the coat-room they met the gigantic Paulo putting on his topcoat. Sangiorgio felt as if suddenly sobered from intoxication, and longed to throw himself on the ample breast of the gallant man, for it was he who had advised the novice to aim at the face, and at the crucial moment Sangiorgio had thought of nothing but that advice.

CHAPTER XI

AN ESSAY IN DIPLOMACY

A GRAVE question had come up two days after the national holiday. In a small Italian town, on the Sunday devoted to patriotic celebration and rejoicing, certain members of the municipal council had manifested the most advanced republican sentiments. The monarchist members had immediately tendered their resignation *en masse*, and had sent indignant telegrams to their deputies, to the newspapers, and to influential men. The affair, all in a moment, had become very serious.

It was midsummer, and the sessions at the Chamber had become dull and tiresome, foreign politics had lapsed into their usual summer lethargy, and no important bills were to be voted on. This new excitement, therefore, sudden and unexpected, awakened passionate interest. The love-making between the Chamber and the Ministry had cooled off considerably, as is always the case with a passion equally shared and gratified.

The new debate was the crack of the whip that awakened this drowsy circle of mutual admirers. Once more they felt the inclination to argue, dispute, and insult; to wage a war of suspicion, of political lies and private calumny. The person most bitterly attacked was the

Minister of the Interior, who, obedient to his cherished ideal of Liberty, had objected to the summary dismissal of the whole misguided municipal council.

This Minister was a man of profound thought, high character, and liberal ideas. He was accustomed to consider political questions with great breadth of view, and, with the generosity of a superior mind, he always maintained that liberty of conscience should be respected. In private conversation with his friends, he laughed at the importance accorded to this tempest in a teapot, quoting the words of the *monatti* of Milan to Renzo Tramaglino: "Fear nothing—it will not be these little rascals, disguised as Erostratus, that will burn the Temple of Law." He said to everyone that the affair was not serious, and his tranquil serenity was in marked contrast to the excitement of those that sought to interview him.

But, in spite of his efforts, the disturbance increased and threatened a crisis. All the malcontents, the ambitious, the mediocre, the envious, agitated, held meetings, talked and argued. They shouted in the cafés, made orations in the restaurants, discoursed at the beer-saloons, hatched plots in the furnished lodgings of all the provincial deputies, and gathered with the mysterious air of conspirators around the little tables set out in summer-time by Ronzi and Singer, the pastry-cooks, in front of their shop in the Piazza Colonna.

At the railway station, every train brought returning deputies, carrying their traveling-bags—the small bags used for hasty journeys, in which the wife packs four

shirts, six handkerchiefs, a pair of slippers, and a cake of soap.

Three hundred and fifty deputies had assembled in Rome—an exceptional number, rarely gathered in the most important winter sessions—and each of these three hundred and fifty men hoped, waited, wished and probably believed that he would become a Minister after the fall of the present cabinet.

The Minister of the Interior—a strong, wise and liberal soul—thought best to seem to ignore this general excitement.

“There will be no crisis,” he replied calmly to such friends as questioned him.

He well knew the political world, however, and the men that composed it. He well knew that the Prime Minister was on his side, and also the six other ministers, and that this group of resolute and powerful men would not allow themselves to be deposed simply because the public authorities in an unimportant town had refused to sign an address to the King, and had raised the tri-colored flag.

He was fully aware of the thirst for power of his eight colleagues, of their struggles to attain it, their desperate tenacity and their passionate attachment to the blue portfolio. He smiled at the thought of the strength of the weak; he smiled, sure of his own victory.

But his friends advised him to be on his guard and to consider the gravity of the situation, pointing out the fact that in this great political caldron were boiling and seething all varieties of Italian temperament.

The Sicilians abandoned themselves to enthusiasm, in which was a mingling of irony and good sense; the Neapolitans shouted and gesticulated; the Romans, prudent and temporizing, waited for the propitious moment to act; the Tuscans laughed in their sleeves, assumed a Machiavellian air of craft, while mocking at themselves and at everyone else; the Lombards held aloof from all others, in aristocratic exclusiveness, the Piedmontese went and came, made a great commotion without saying anything, understanding one another by nods and winks. But the most ardent, the most excited, the fiercest, were the representatives from the smaller provinces—the Abruzzi, the Marches, the Romagnas, the Campania, the Calabria—representatives for whom politics is a grand passion, who regard it as the greatest earthly power, and revel in it as in a generous wine.

In the midst of all this tumult, the men from the Basilicata were silent, did not form themselves into a group, asked for nothing, answered no queries, but remained consistently cold and correct in their public demeanor

The Minister of the Interior, that man of sterling integrity, felt secure; he never had had occasion to fear anything, so he continued to smile. When he entered the Chamber, on the day when the great question was to be discussed, a prolonged murmur swept along the benches. He noticed it, but being strong and self-contained in all things, great or small, he was shrewd enough not to look around him, nor to raise his eyes to the galleries. He understood, however, that this affair

was more serious than he had supposed. The evening before, he had said to the Prime Minister, unconcernedly:

"They are making a tremendous fuss about this affair of the municipal revolt."

"Nothing but midsummer madness."

"Then you agree with me?"

"Certainly I do," the Prime Minister had replied, without inquiring as to details.

"Do you think Mario Tasca's speech will be important?"

"As much so as his speeches usually are."

That was all the Prime Minister would say to him. His other colleagues maintained a strict reserve, save Vargas, the thin, dried-up old Minister of Fine Arts, consumed by burning ambition, who made only one remark, of slight importance, to which the Minister of the Interior made no reply. But now, in the presence of this demonstrative assemblage, he fully comprehended the gravity of the situation.

While he was preparing his documents, he guessed, from the volume of sound going on about him, that at least four hundred deputies were in the hall. He threw a quick glance at the diplomatic gallery. The beautiful Countess di Santaninfa, fair and dreamy, bent her large, melancholy eyes upon the amphitheater; the Countess di Malgra, a fascinating blonde, attired in black, looked attentively at the gathering below her, the public gallery was full, and in the press gallery a triple row of heads leaned eagerly forward.

"Ah! they smell the powder of battle!" said the Minister to himself.

He was about to address his fellow Ministers, but they appeared so indifferent that he remained silent. The great hall had become more quiet, but the assembly presented an aspect universally hard and fixed—a solid body of four hundred silent and attentive men.

At three o'clock, precisely, Mario Tasca, a deputy of the Right, rose and began to speak from his place in the last row of benches. He was an old diplomatist, with a pink-and-white complexion and a graceful figure, and spoke in flowing phrases, accompanied by sweeping gestures. His discourse ran on and on, without hesitation, without stopping, like the song of a nightingale; the orator gazed upward, like a dramatic tenor sure of his notes. But beneath this mild demeanor the knowing ones perceived a sharp rebuke. While he spoke in vague and general terms, he nevertheless managed to convey the impression that certain ideas and institutions, which heretofore had been sacred and which no one had dared to criticise, had been grievously assailed. He made his charges in a tone of moderation, mentioning no names, nor did he set forth the exact facts, contenting himself with making a direct appeal to the conscience.

The Minister of the Interior listened attentively; the Prime Minister appeared to be taking notes; all the other Ministers looked grave; the deputies turned toward Tasca, in order to hear all his remarks; the occupants of the public gallery leaned over the railing; the two Countesses, blonde and brunette, seemed to listen with

delight to the flowing, melodious tones of the Tuscan deputy.

He spoke a whole hour in this way, but his closing remarks and gestures were more animated. A long murmur of satisfaction and approval followed his peroration.

The Minister of the Interior sought the eyes of the Prime Minister, but that gentleman went on with his writing. So he rose, and began his reply in a tone of equal moderation, reducing the question to its just proportions, smoothing over the facts, and avoiding all high-sounding phrases and long words. He spoke quietly, trying to read the effect of his words in the faces of his auditors, but all looked frowning and dissatisfied, what they had wished for and expected was a session full of spirited debate and hot argument—this moderation was far from interesting.

Vainly did he lavish his most specious reasoning and all the ingenuities of his mind; he was not in harmony with the prevailing spirit, and public disapproval of his remarks became more manifest every moment.

A glacial silence greeted the end of his discourse. Niccolo Ferro, the great orator of the Extreme Left, asked for the floor. The Minister frowned; he felt that here was the danger.

Ferro, the Radical deputy, with a clear voice and cool manner, spoke in phrases as cutting as steel blades. He threw a new light upon the situation as presaging the dawn of a new era; the manifestation of the municipal council was a sign of the times; who would dare to violate the liberty of conscience by punishing such a mani-

festation? A councilor is a citizen free to think according to his convictions, and to act as he thinks. Ancient institutions do not decline by the mere act of men; modern ideas and progress are the cause of their downfall.

Niccolo Ferro then declared openly that he was both pleased and displeased with the Minister's speech· displeased because the audacity and courage of those brave men had been ridiculed, and pleased, because he felt well assured that notwithstanding the hallucinations of those who held the reins of power, no act of repression toward those citizens would take place.

The Minister of the Interior understood the purport of these words, and he looked at Niccolo Ferro, his friend, with a kind glance, unmingled with reproach. He felt the astonishment of the Chamber at the temerity of the Radical deputy; he realized that they wished to force him into an equivocal position from which he could not escape. He could neither declare himself at one with Niccolo Ferro, nor oppose himself directly against him. What! he at one with the Republicans; he, a Minister of the Crown! How should he reply? The Prime Minister alone, with his shrewdness and goodfellowship, could save the situation, and put back in their places the wordy Tasca and the impudent Ferro. But the old Premier read a letter placidly, as calm as if he were in the silence of his own study.

The floor was given to the Honorable Sangiorgio, who, in his very first words, began a fierce attack upon the Cabinet, saying that the facts of the case in question

were very serious; that during a whole year the greatest disorder had existed in the management of home affairs, there was no one that guided matters, no authority anywhere; all officials acted at their own discretion, receiving no orders from anyone; and that this culpable unconcern, these ultra-liberal theories would carry the country to its ruin.

Sangiorgio enumerated the increasing number of political associations, he called attention to the fact that socialists held meetings in all localities, and named a prefect who had been present at a banquet where the King's health had not been drunk—and added that the Minister of the Interior, who was perfectly cognizant of this affair, had not removed that prefect from office.

The orator went on to say that everything was done helter-skelter and without system: that no energetic circulars of instruction were sent out from Rome, nor were any strong and salutary measures carried out within it. Important communications remained unanswered, and the Government amused itself in making philosophic or moral deductions!

The excited listeners shouted their approval of these remarks. The young deputy spoke in a hard voice, in short phrases and with such exactness of statement that every sentence told: it was an act of direct accusation, like the address of a public prosecutor to a malicious and obstinate magistrate. Sangiorgio had a rugged physiognomy, a look of firmness on his tense face; he did not smile, nor did he gesticulate, or resort to any of the tricks and graces of an orator. His speech was a recital

of facts, nothing but facts, and yet more facts; and after each statement he added, "But that is not all—there is more to follow;" and these words, repeated again and again, with the monotony of a tragic Chorus, made a deep and unexpected impression.

The very air was charged with electricity; no one read or wrote now; all heads were turned toward the speaker. In the diplomatic gallery sat the perennially beautiful Lalla d'Ariccia; her appearance was the sure barometer of crises, as she never attended the Chamber except to witness the fall of a Cabinet. Luisa Catalani, in a lace frock and mantilla, leaned over the railing, and Angelica Vargas listened gravely, her face alight with interest and curiosity.

After summing up all that he had said in one brief final charge, Sangiorgio, without waiting for anyone to make a reply, read the following: "I move that the House, disapproving of the home policy of the Ministry, do now proceed with the business of the day.—Francesco Sangiorgio."

An instant of silence followed, in which was audible the deep bass tones of the Honorable Scheffer, growling: "Thunder and lightning!"

Then such a cheer and clamor arose that the Speaker rang his bell in vain for order fully five minutes. Argument and discussions sounded on all sides in the Chamber, in the semicircle, on the benches and stairs, and in the galleries.

The Minister of the Interior—strong, honest man that he was!—was compelled to admire the skill and vigor

of Sangiorgio's attack upon him, but he began to feel some apprehension. So vigorous an attack, made by a deputy well known for his ministerial sympathies, aggravated the situation to the verge of actual peril.

The defence now lay only in the hands of the chief, the old parliamentarian—the Prime Minister. But the Minister of the Interior felt a sudden suspicion. The Prime Minister remained silent, continuing to write and to stroke his beard with his left hand.

The Minister of the Interior controlled himself by a strong effort, and appeared calm, though very pale. His suspicion was well grounded, then. He felt that he had been betrayed and abandoned, and that his associates wished to get rid of him. The base stratagem had succeeded, and they now wished to cut him off, as if he were a decomposing limb—and the whole Chamber approved the operation!

When the Speaker gave him the floor, that he might reply, he replied in a clear and tranquil voice:

"I have nothing to say; I accept the Sangiorgio motion."

There was a majority of thirty votes against him. The Minister of the Interior had fallen!

A week later, an official newspaper announced:

"At the present writing, we are able to declare that, in the reorganization of the Cabinet, Don Silvio Vargas will be transferred from the Fine Arts to the Department of the Interior. The Honorable Sangiorgio, who has been solicited to join in the new combination, has refused, and has left Rome for a visit to the Basilicata."

CHAPTER XII

THE ONLY WOMAN

A FUNERREAL atmosphere; an interior whose dimness is barely relieved by the blue flame of the pagan torches and the pale yellow light of Christian tapers; an odor of the tomb, sobbing music; a throng of people in deepest black, lost in the shadows of the great stone walls; and in that atmosphere, that dim light, amid that noble music in the deep shadows, all eyes filled again and again with tears.

Sangiorgio, sitting motionless in his place, felt his heart pierced with a languorous sadness, when suddenly he felt a thrill, and a strong impulse to turn around.

He saw, at only a short distance, that sweet, that exquisite woman, Angelica Vargas, dressed in black, in a style of mourning as ceremonious as such an occasion demanded, in the Pantheon, which was now consecrated to the glory and the death of the Hero—Victor Emmanuel.*

Her eyes were fixed upon a candle, and she seemed to hear and see nothing, absorbed in sad thoughts, plunged in mournful dreams. She sat near a column, and at first she essayed to read from her prayerbook the service for the dead, but the book had fallen on her knees, and

* This refers to the ceremony of transferring the remains of Victor Emmanuel II to the Pantheon.

her inert hands had not sufficient energy to lift it again.

To Sangiorgio that sad face appeared divine, with its pearl-like pallor intensified by the dark veil, the lips parted in prayer, the eyes fixed in mystic contemplation. And the bluish light of the lamps, the metallic gleam of the torches, the wailing chords that seemed sad enough to soften those old stone walls of Rome—all were, to his mind, in some mysterious way connected with this woman; she herself personified that mournful winter day, sad and sunless; she was the moral source of all the tears shed around her; she was the abyss of sorrow, which no human griefs could ever fill; and in his manly heart a sentiment of mingled love and pity sprang into being, and then it grew and flourished and waxed strong.

She, all unconscious, gave herself up to her feminine fancies, in that short hour of freedom and forgetfulness. At times the music rolled forth with an intense expression, a strain more moving; then she was thrilled for a moment, returning again to her interrupted reverie, her eyelids showing the pale violet tint left by recent tears.

A wonderful change of feeling took place in Sangiorgio's heart as he contemplated that sweet face, on which the finger of grief had laid its mark. The sadness that possessed her little by little came to dominate his own feelings, to the point of utter absorption in, and sharing of, her emotion.

He was unconscious of any surprise at realizing that his own personality seemed to disappear and be merged into that of another. And it was not pity alone that he

felt: pity is a personal sentiment, an individual formula, capable of analysis. He suffered from a sensation of physical anguish; tears, which he could not shed, burned his eyes; he forgot his own personality in a mental sea of sympathetic pain, without beginning or end.

A cloud of subtly sweet incense floated through the temple, its spirals rising from the altars to the dome, lighter and lighter, thinner and thinner, floating ever upward, like prayers mounting to Heaven. The incense, too, seemed to partake of the savor of tears, and its perfume affected the nerves with a kind of voluptuousness of grief. The women bowed their heads beneath this mournful aromatic kiss. Sangiorgio wished to approach Angelica, but a singular feeling of shyness restrained him, and meanwhile the incense went on burning in the sacred censers.

A bell rang faintly. Angelica slipped from her chair to the marble pavement, hid her face in her hands, and seemed no more than a mass of mourning draperies sunk upon the ground, forgotten, lost, desolate.

Sangiorgio did not kneel, nor pray, nor even bow his head, but he was swayed by the prostrate grief of the woman, and overcome by the same sounds that affected her.

A line of priests, with lighted tapers, was ranged around the catafalque; a silver crucifix stood before the coffin itself.

Presently rose a strident, penetrating voice, a voice that neither chanted nor prayed, but cried despairingly, "*Libera, libera, libera me, Signore!*"

The Christian prayer, the mournful invocation, made the sweet Angelica raise her eyes, and an ardent desire expressed itself on her transfigured face. Now her confused thoughts took exact form and dwelt on the Deliverance! The hero who lay in the sepulcher, to whom the highest funeral honors were being paid, had found a glorious deliverance, and, freed from the weight of a crown, from the burden of power, from the duties and responsibilities of earthly royalty, had found rest in eternal peace.

"As sleeps the King, so let me sleep, O God!" was Angelica's prayer. "Deliver my soul as Thou hast delivered the soul of the King, O Father of Mercies! If deliverance is to be found only through death, then let me die. O God, *libera me*!" And at this moment of anguished appeal, the sweet Angelica raised her hands to heaven, and burning tears flowed down her cheeks.

Sangiorgio divined her fervent prayer, and that earnest petition found an echo in his own breast. A kind of intoxication, an ecstatic joy, pure and exalted, resulted from this consciousness of a desire in common. Seeing Angelica so weak and exhausted, he yielded to the pressure of deep emotion; he bowed his proud head and wept—for love!

With her fair face half buried in a cluster of white roses, whose rich perfume she inhaled deeply, Angelica Vargas listened to a conversation between her husband and Sangiorgio.

They had been talking politics for an hour, or rather,

Silvio Vargas had held forth alone, half reclining upon a divan, puffing at a terrible Tuscan cigar, his eyes fixed on the floral decorations painted on the ceiling of his drawing-room. He discoursed in his nasal voice, speaking in brief phrases, sending clouds of smoke into the air, while with his free hand he twirled his heavy moustache, which, like his hair, had remained brown, despite his years.

Age did not show in that dry and spare old man, except for the fan-like spread of fine wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, and two furrows at each side of his mouth when he smiled. But his slender body was as strong and firm as oak logs that lie for years in the water before being fit for use. When he fixed in his right eye a monocle suspended by a black ribbon, his face took on an expression of almost youthful vivacity.

When Angelica had heard Sangiorgio's name announced, after luncheon, she had risen to retire to her own apartments. But her husband, while folding one newspaper and opening another, requested her not to go in a few brief words, as if he wished to be obeyed. She remained standing, near a vase of cineraria, after bowing to the newcomer.

Her slender, youthful figure was no longer attired in mourning robes, but showed to advantage in a gray gown with large folds, cut in a half-monastic style. A heavy cord encircled her waist, and her delicate hands were half hidden in the ample sleeves. From time to time she turned toward the men to approve with a smile or a glance some sharp sally from her husband or a

remark by Sangiorgio, although she busied herself with her flowers, examining each plant with fond attention, wiping dust from the leaves, here and there cutting off a dry twig. Her white fingers flitted over the flowers, which appeared to transform the formal drawing-room into a springtime bower—those white fingers as graceful and dimpled as a child's.

As she leaned over the plants, the nape of her white neck was visible, shaded by the curved line of her dark hair, which was dressed high. The traces of tears had disappeared from her eyelids, and her gentle face beamed placidly. Once she looked interrogatively at her husband's hard face, but with a slight sign he ordered her to remain in the room.

The care of her plants finished, she seated herself at a window and inhaled the fragrance of her roses, her usually pale cheeks slightly flushed.

The room was strewn with newspapers, still smelling of printers' ink; the carpet was littered with multi-colored wrappers, which had been hastily torn from the journals. But Angelica did not pick them up nor touch the newspapers; she did not even look at them, though she pushed away one or two wrappers with an instinctive desire for neatness. She kept pressing the roses to her lips and cheeks.

Francesco had come to this house, in the Piazza dell' Apollinare, at the invitation of Silvio Vargas. The new Minister of the Interior had approached him on the peristyle of the Pantheon, had slipped an arm through his, and said a few words to him in an undertone. Then he

had asked the deputy to come to see him—not at the Parliament House, no—at his own residence, after luncheon. The Minister wished to have a private talk with him—hang it! Why did he never come to call there?

“To-morrow, then?” said the deputy, hesitatingly.

“To-morrow! You are dreaming!” Vargas replied “No, come to-day.” And he had left Sangiorgio to re-join his wife.

The deputy arrived at one o’clock, fearing that he was too early, though the cordiality of his host immediately reassured him. But, while the Minister expatiated at length on men and events, the deputy followed with his eyes the supple and sinuous movements of the fair Angelica.

“Will you smoke?” said Silvio Vargas, offering cigars, while he continued to chew the end of his Tuscan weed.

Sangiorgio looked toward the lady.

“It will not annoy Donna Angelica,” said the Minister dryly.

But the deputy refrained from smoking, in spite of a gracious smile from Angelica. Seated near a table, he spoke little, for the old parliamentarian approved of attentive listeners.

Silvio Vargas adored politics with the ardor of a youth of twenty, but to-day something in the great game had gone wrong with him, and in his reproaches, his disgust, his nervous anger, was revealed the long-standing passion that consumed him. Sangiorgio, in listening to him, fancied he recognized his own thoughts, dreams, and ambitions.

From time to time, Silvio Vargas, in looking at Sangiorgio, suppressed the sneer which usually marked two furrows on his sallow cheeks, and smiled at the young man almost affectionately. He did not forget that his predecessor in office had fallen from power through a speech and a motion of this same young deputy! He did not forget his refusal to make one of the new combination. He never could express his gratitude, but at the reopening of Parliament he had treated the young man in a most friendly way, and often consulted him with an air at once cordial and deferential.

"But, in your heart, politics and power really bore you, do they not?" said Sangiorgio, after a short silence.

"No," Vargas replied frankly. "They do not bore me; on the contrary, they please me. I have always desired power. But the Opposition disgusts me—so much hypocrisy, stupidity, lying, brutality, and bad faith! Where is the loyal, audacious, implacable, even cruel Opposition? Instead of frank and open attack, we have back-stairs gossip; instead of an honest fight, they crawl out of sight; and instead of legitimate debate, they resort to low trickery."

"The men of to-day are without largeness of mind," said Sangiorgio.

"No, no—not altogether! By heavens, sir! I once belonged to the Opposition myself! Do you remember, Angelica, when I was in Opposition?"

"Yes, I remember," she replied sweetly, raising her head from her roses.

"I was a devil in those days! I never gave my op-

ponents any rest, I assure you. No truce to anyone! But now I am growing lazy. I don't feel like fighting; I prefer to look on, though all this brigandage makes my blood boil. How you attacked the Government at that famous session, Sangiorgio! Were you there, Angelica?"

"Yes, I was there."

"And I owe it to you that I am now Minister of the Interior," said Vargas, with feeling.

"Oh, no!" said Sangiorgio, smiling.

"Yes, yes! The Prime Minister never would have had the courage to break openly with his colleague! I am surprised that he spoke of it to you; no one dreamed of it, not even myself "

"The Prime Minister never mentioned the matter to me."

"What? You did not know what was coming?"

"I knew nothing "

"There was no understanding between you?"

"None "

"The deuce! You are a remarkable fellow!" Vargas exclaimed.

He looked at Sangiorgio admiringly. The latter laughed mechanically, a little embarrassed, but he observed that Angelica's face had lost its serenity, and that she looked tired.

"Come to the Chamber with me, Sangiorgio," said the Minister, rising to go out.

"Shall you return early?" asked the young wife, arousing herself from her reverie by the window.

"No. First, I shall go to the Chamber, then to the Senate, and after that I must go to a meeting of the Cabinet to sign a prefectoral appointment."

"Shall you return by seven o'clock?"

"I don't know."

"Shall I call for you at the Chamber?"

"No. Go and take a drive to the Villa Borghese, out in the country—wherever you please. It will be useless to come to Montecitorio. I shall dine there after I have finished my work. This prefectoral affair is very serious, Sangiorgio; I will explain it to you as we go along. If a letter or a telegram should arrive for me, send it to me at the Chamber, or the Senate, or at the Cabinet meeting. I expect important news. Come, my dear fellow."

His orders had been given briefly, concisely, in the tone of one accustomed to obedience, to his wife, the servants, and his secretary, who had just entered the room. At that moment Vargas had the elasticity and vigor of twenty years. He went into an adjoining room with his secretary, and talked with him there a moment.

Francesco and Angelica were left alone, he standing, she with her head bent as it was when she was praying at the Pantheon, and her fingers toying idly with the silken girdle around her waist.

Neither spoke for a moment, and that interval seemed like a prolonged musical vibration, full of throbbing meaning. Suddenly she raised her lovely sad eyes to his and clasped her hands.

"Why did you wish my husband to become Minister

of the Interior?" she asked, in a voice trembling with emotion.

But at that moment Vargas reentered with his topcoat and hat on, still gnawing the end of his extinct cigar. His secretary followed him, carrying a portfolio full of papers.

"Will you have a rose?" said Angelica suddenly to her husband, approaching him as if to fasten a flower in his coat.

"Are you mad?" cried Vargas, pushing away the white hand brusquely. "Do you wish the whole Opposition to laugh at me? A Minister with a rose! My caricature would be in all the newspapers!"

Angelica drew back. She looked quickly at Sangiorgio, but she did not offer him a rose.

A lowering sky, covered with heavy gray clouds, hanging black over the Tusculan hills; a yellowish-brown, undulating landscape; two black hedges, dry and prickly, without a leaf or a blossom; a little inn, with a rude sign—a *pulcinella*, or female Punch, drinking from a cup, with three black mouths arranged in a triangle—windows and doors closed tight; the large building where the Widow Mangani dispenses hospitality to the Roman people during the delightful season of lamb and tripe; a carter lying flat on his stomach in his wagon, sound asleep; and from time to time heavy drops of rain falling on the earth.

Near the church of St. Agnes, a cardinal's carriage came along the road, returning from the catacombs; a

few priests walked slowly along the side path; at a distance were two carabinieri on horseback, sitting erect, wrapped in their black mantles, a penetrating odor filled the air, that peculiar odor of the Roman Campagna, which steals into the blood like a subtle poison.

A soft, mild breeze was blowing; a lost dog trotted along the road, his tail between his legs, looking anxiously at every passer with the sad expression of a lost animal—such was the picture that met Sangiorgio's eyes on the last day of that winter, in the Via Nomentana. And over all hung the gloomy curtain of impending rain, the indescribable melancholy of a stormy twilight on the Roman Campagna

"There is the Ponte Nomentana," said the coachman, pointing to the bridge with his whip

"Stop here, then; I wish to get out," said Sangiorgio. "Wait here for me."

He climbed the little hill leading to the strange covered bridge, the wide arch of which spans the banks of the Aniene

Sangiorgio halted in the middle of the bridge, and leaned against the railing to gaze into the river. The water was deep and winding at this point, and flowed with great rapidity, increased at this season by the heavy winter rains; the stream looked silvery white, cold and dull. A number of little whirlpools were formed in its course—tiny circles with a central depression round which spread ever-widening ripples.

Along the banks the earth was light-colored, but

without a plant or any vestige of verdure; and all around extended the dreary desert of the Campagna

The rain had not yet begun to fall, but the spray from the river and evening dampness had made the old bridge wet; in touching the railing and the walls, Sangiorgio felt the moisture, which had soiled the elbows of his coat

He gazed around at the plain, unbroken by the outline of a man or a tree; the stream rippled on with the melancholy music of running water, and hastened to throw itself into the bosom of the Tiber

On the opposite bank the Via Nomentana formed a sharp angle and disappeared suddenly; in the middle of a field stood a deserted, ruined cottage, without a roof; at a turn of the road was a neat little white building, the Huntsman's Inn, back of which a fine meadow extended toward the stream.

Near this point were groups of willows on the stony bank. A small boat floated on the water, made fast to a post by a rope. The current boiled and bubbled around the boat, the roots of the willows, and the stones.

Now the lowering sky appeared almost to touch the earth. While gazing intently at the horizon, Sangiorgio suddenly perceived a carriage, which had stopped near the Huntsman's Inn, but which was turned in such a manner that he could not see either the horses or the coachman

Some one descended from the carriage, and then, far in the distance, he discerned a woman's figure, slowly walking along the right bank of the river. Nearer and

nearer she came, and presently he recognized the sweet lady he had seen weeping in the Pantheon. Alone, dressed in black, she walked slowly beside the stream, gazing into the water, her little feet making slight imprints on the damp soil.

As she drew nearer to Sangiorgio, he saw, fastened against the black background of her bodice, the cluster of roses that she had held and caressed in her drawing-room in the early afternoon

Two or three times she stopped, and looked up at the threatening sky, which appeared ready to fall upon the earth and smother it; she tried to descry the Tusculan hills, now enveloped in mist; then she resumed her walk so slowly that she hardly appeared to move at all.

She did not raise her eyes to the great bridge, at the wide opening of which stood the man that had wept with her and for her.

There was usually absolute solitude in this lonely spot, where no sound was heard but the rushing wind and the rippling water; Angelica believed herself to be as much alone as if she were in an empty church, praying to God.

She stopped about fifty paces from the bridge, and leaned lightly against the stone stake to which the little boat was fastened. She seemed overcome by lassitude; perhaps it was only the fascination of the bubbling water that made her pause.

A mass of black clouds rose from the horizon; the light faded rapidly from the face of heaven and earth.

Sangiorgio saw nothing but the form of that woman, motionless as a statue on the bank of the stream.

But presently a sound was heard in the direction of the Via Nomentana—a sound of wheels and horses' feet; something red and bright illuminated the gathering darkness. Under the lowered top of a Daumont carriage, something white was visible—a handsome face, a royal countenance. The equipage crossed the bridge at a quick trot, and the Queen acknowledged the deputy's salutation. Then the dazzling vision disappeared, like a flash of lightning, on the way to Rome.

Sangiorgio turned again toward the river.

The lady on the bank had heard nothing of all this. Lost in thought, she was unconscious of everything in the material world, even of the passing of the royal carriage, whose red lights had for an instant made a kind of comet-like glare in the gray twilight.

Angelica never raised her eyes from the cold waters of the Aniene. Presently she began to pluck the petals from one of her roses and throw them into the stream; then she pulled another to pieces; and, one by one, all the roses met the same fate, the fragrant snowy petals being swept along the current toward Tivoli.

She threw one last glance around the lonely country, and returned to her waiting carriage. Presently it crossed the bridge; Angelica did not perceive Sangiorgio, but he noticed that the fair and pensive lady still held to her breast the rose-stalks, now stripped of their petals.

CHAPTER XIII

ANGELICA DISCUSSES POLITICS

SEATED on his bench, of the Center, where he pretended to be writing letters, but where, in reality, he traced a single name twenty or thirty times on a sheet of paper, Sangiorgio distinctly saw Angelica Vargas sitting alone in the diplomatic gallery, resting her arm on the velvet railing

A certain instinct had warned him of her presence, and he ventured to turn toward her and bow. She responded with a serious smile, and immediately turned away her head.

He was seized with a desire to go up there at once and sit beside her, but doubted the propriety of making her so conspicuous to his colleagues.

Soon, however, the desire became so strong that he rose, crossed the hall, and went out into the corridor, where he wandered about a moment or two, replying briefly to those who spoke to him of the University Reform Law. He lacked courage to mount those stairs, and, ashamed of his weakness, he was about to return to his place.

As he passed the Ministerial bench, Silvio Vargas called him:

"Listen, Sangiorgio"—

And he told him something about the Communal and

Provincial Law, then under discussion for the third time.

Silvio Vargas's liking for the young man had grown rapidly; every time that a doubt arose in his mind as to political or administrative matters, he sought out the deputy, took him to his house, introduced him into his private office, and had a long talk with him. Now he had another project to submit to his approval. Sangiorgio gave him his opinion, and then said:

"Signora Vargas is up in the diplomatic gallery."

"Indeed!" said the Minister, with perfect indifference. "Do you believe that the discussion will be lively?"

"Yes, on the fourth article; the Extreme Left is very strong on that."

"Shall you speak, Sangiorgio?"

"I do not know"—

"You ought to speak. Listen: come and dine to-morrow with me, and I will explain to you all my ideas"—

"Thank you; I will come," Sangiorgio replied, after an instant of hesitation. He was about to move away, but the Minister recalled him.

"Since you are in the mood to sacrifice yourself for me, go up in the gallery and keep my wife company. She must be bored to death, and I have not time even to go up and speak to her."

"Do you think she is bored?"

"Yes, she detests politics. Woman is an egoistic being, my young friend," Silvio replied philosophically, adjusting his monocle.

Sangiorgio hastily gathered up his papers, threw them into a drawer, and quickly mounted the stairs. Angelica

Vargas did not turn her head, although she heard the door of the gallery open.

"Are you very much bored, Signora?" inquired Sangiorgio, in a quiet tone, as he stepped to her side.

"Not more than usual, Signor," she replied, giving him her hand, without any manifestation of surprise

Sangiorgio sat down, a little behind her. The young woman spoke to him without looking at him, her eyes fixed on the hall below.

"You come here quite often, do you not?"

"Yes. Even boredom becomes a habit. And then—Silvio is a Minister, and everyone seems to think I have a great deal of influence. Our house is continually besieged with people wanting one thing or another."

"Why do you not forbid your door to them?"

"That is impossible for the wife of a politician. Silvio is always apprehensive lest I should make him lose his popularity."

Her voice was bitter.

"Are you compelled, then, to submit to contact with the vulgar crowd?" he asked, with a tender accent that made her change color.

"Yes. I am very indulgent by nature, but vulgarity offends and hurts me."

"You must steel your heart against it."

"The heart! The heart does not matter. It is the nerves that cause suffering. And so I prefer to come here. between two evils, I choose the lesser."

"You hate politics, then?"

"I do not exactly hate it, but I do not like it."

"But politics is a grand and noble idea," he hazarded.

"They say so, but I do not understand it. I do know of other ideas that are noble, generous, great; but this!—I am too ignorant, I suppose," she murmured humbly.

"No, no!" Sangiorgio hastened to say. "Perhaps you are right."

"I cannot like politics," she went on. "To us women, certain ideas—above all, when they are purely abstract—represent nothing to our minds. We need something concrete to bring an idea clearly before us. Thus, religion is typified by the Church, by the images of Christ and the Virgin; patriotism is represented by our native land, by our childhood friends. But your politics"—

"Is represented by the politicians," interrupted Sangiorgio with a smile.

"Oh, yes, of course," she replied, with disdainful indifference.

"And the politicians—do you hate them too?"

"I pity them."

He felt a touch of resentment, and a pained expression came over his face.

"I often study them," Angelica continued. "What haggard faces, yellow with bile, green with envy! What pale, sickly, unwholesome faces! All seem affected with the same malady—a fatal malady, which ruins and kills them. I fancy that the gamblers in the gaming-hells must look like them."

"Well, at least, politics is a great passion," Sangiorgio ventured to say.

"Great? Perhaps, but I do not think so. When poli-

tics takes possession of a man, it weighs him down with petty ambitions, unworthy pride, degrading compromises. There are three hundred men in this hall; all are intelligent and educated, all have moral and physical courage, all have clean consciences and upright characters. Well, these three hundred brains, these three hundred wills, these three hundred intelligences—what is the ambition of each one, without exception?”

“To be a Minister.”

“Yes, to be a Minister, at no matter what cost. Must not the human mind become miserably atrophied through incessant dwelling on that one implacable desire? Can man, capable as he is of working miracles in science and in art, ever produce anything good and wholesome in this vitiated atmosphere?”

“You are right,” he said.

“To invent something that increases the happiness of mankind—is not that better worth while than to be able to bring about the fall of a cabinet? To carve a statue, paint a picture, write a book—is not that better than to form a ministry?”

“Yes, that is true,” he admitted again.

“And as to courage, do you believe that a man can preserve it, with all its vigor and strength, in this place, where everything is summed up in a wordy speech, and where all noble initiative is lost in twenty-five sessions and in fourteen committee-meetings? Too many words, too many words, Signor!”

“But we all fought when we were needed”

“Yes,” she replied, thoughtfully. “Yes—once! I can

comprehend the heroism of the battlefield and of conspiracies, but parliamentary heroism does not impress me."

They were silent a moment. A little flame of color had crept into Angelica's fair cheeks; her impulsive words floated in Sangiorgio's brain and impressed themselves there as if sealed with wax upon paper.

"Then there is conscience," she pursued, wishing to free her mind. "How can it remain pure among so many lies? How can it stand firm, invulnerable, when the surest path to success is to render oneself pliable?"

"True, true!" murmured her listener.

"Yes, truly, politics is a great passion! All women in my situation know something of that, alas! That passion, once it obtains possession of a man's heart, reigns there as absolute mistress, driving out everything else. If we live in the country, the man abandons us for nine months out of every year, without a thought of the youth, the beauty, or the loneliness of the wife he leaves behind him. If we come to Rome, it is still worse; the house becomes a miniature Parliament, where conspiracies are hatched if we are not in power, and means of defence are prepared if we are Ministers. No more friends: nothing but allies, toadies, office-seekers, rivals! We do not ask for their friendship: what we want is their votes. If a man says, 'Yes,' he is our friend; if he says 'No,' he is a traitor. All privacy is lost—spoiled by a throng of strangers, who turn the home into a street, a square, a public thoroughfare. Confidence disappears, the husband is nervous, restless, irritable, but

does not talk of his worries, because he despises feminine advice. At the table, he opens telegrams or reads newspapers. At a ball, the wife sits by herself, because the husband must represent the Government, talk with influential deputies, bow to the wives of party leaders. We must choose between the terrible solitary life in the country, where one lives for long months like an abandoned wife, and the noisy life of the city, without a breath of poetry, or one smile of the ideal. A great passion, yes! but also a furious, absorbing, destroying passion, which terrifies and disgusts!"

Again silence fell between them. Down on the floor Silvio Vargas was speaking in a strident voice, his hands in his pockets, bending his thin body slightly forward, and looking at the man he interrogated with an expression of biting scorn, irritating in the extreme.

"A great passion, a great passion!" murmured Angelica. "But we women understand only one!"

"And that is"—

"Love!"

"True!" Sangiorgio replied.

CHAPTER XIV

THE QUIRINAL BALL

“**W**E shall dine alone this evening,” said Silvio Vargas to Sangiorgio, as they sat down at the table.

The Minister’s secretary joined them, but the hostess’s place was vacant. In the center of the family dining-table stood a cluster of red lilies in a crystal vase, and Sangiorgio’s eyes wandered continually from these gorgeous red flowers to the vacant chair.

The deputy and the Minister talked briskly, without paying much attention to what was set before them, Silvio cutting his food nervously while he expounded his views on the Communal and Provincial Law; Sangiorgio listening, replying, making objections, and forgetting his dinner completely, for his thoughts were not confined within the bright, warm little dining-room; they strayed to a sacred place, behind closed doors—to the dressing-room of Angelica Vargas.

Only the secretary did full justice to the dinner; he appreciated all the delicacies, without for a moment relaxing in respectful attention to his chief. Now and then he nodded approval of the Minister’s remarks, or frowned slightly at some criticism from the deputy.

The repast proceeded, while at intervals a servant brought in a letter, a telegram, or a fresh relay of plates.

Vargas read the letters, opened the telegrams, but hardly looked at the dishes offered him.

Near him stood a small table, on which were an inkstand, a pen, telegraph blanks, and letter paper. He said that he must answer these communications at once, and proceeded to write, pushing away his plate and handing a marked newspaper to his secretary, who read the interesting paragraph with the wise air of an old diplomatist.

Sangiorgio tried in vain to catch some sound coming from Angelica's private apartments; but no maid came out or went in, no bell sounded and there was no movement of any kind to denote that a beautiful woman was *dressing for a royal ball!*

A burning desire to know and to hear something consumed Sangiorgio, who was growing nervous and impatient in the heat of the dining-room, where he was compelled to listen to the eternal political talk; the desire sprang from the sight of that empty chair, pushed back as if its late occupant had only just left it, and those deep-hued lilies, the *flaming flowers* of passion.

If she would only enter the room for a moment to greet her husband and his guest! If she would only let him behold her in the radiance of her youth and beauty! Every time the door opened, Sangiorgio started, closed his eyes for an instant, expecting to open them on a vision of grace and splendor; but the door opened only to bring another telegram, another letter, a special messenger; and once Silvio drew from his pocket a *secret cipher*, with which to translate an official despatch.

Where, then, was Angelica? On what perfumed breezes had she disappeared?

Time passed, and nothing in the house suggested festive preparations; people came and went, the servants appeared busy with their master's affairs, and the whole place seemed like a public square, a stock exchange, a political gathering-place.

Perhaps, in her private sanctuary, the girlish beauty of Angelica was surrounded by the pleasing excitement and disorder of preparation for a grand function: scattered linen, silk stockings peeping out of half-open drawers, unstoppered flasks, light flounces sweeping the floor. But of all this intoxicating feminine disorder not a breath escaped to the outer apartment.

Yet Sangiorgio felt his whole being penetrated with a strange charm; he was struck by the contrast between the dreary, dry details of the Minister's life and the poetic sweetness of that feminine toilet. A tender agitation stirred his heart and his senses.

At last, at ten o'clock, doors outside opened and shut; a voice spoke, in very low tones, and Sangiorgio, his mind filled with the one great desire, believed that now she must surely come. But no one appeared, and after a moment there was a sound of wheels rolling over the pavement under the windows.

"My wife has gone to the Quirinal," said Vargas, placidly, opening a copy of *La Riforma*, which had just been handed to him. "Shall you go, too, Sangiorgio?"

"Yes—later," Sangiorgio replied, very pale.

In the white glare of the electric lights that illumin-

ated the grand staircase of the Quirinal, the women filed slowly upward, placing only the tips of their little satin slippers on each step, and doing their best to display in the brilliant light their flowing trains, their feathered, flowery, or bejeweled coiffures. They cast only a passing glance at the great green shrubs, and the statues of the Muses surrounded by waving palms that showed dark and graceful against the white stuccoed walls.

These fair ones did not smile or laugh, so that the perfect serenity of their countenances might be preserved. They mounted the stairs slowly, that they might not feel the heat, as they did not wish to spoil their beauty with a complexion too flushed or too pale. They looked like animated statues in the great tapestried apartment that had been transformed into a dressing-room, as they untied ribbons and took off scarfs and mantles. With the utmost deliberation, they smoothed the folds of their long suède gloves, and readjusted the short sleeves of their bodices, while impatient husbands, fathers, and brothers waited without, to offer their arms to the leisurely ladies.

The passage through the two long outer rooms was also performed in silence, although those ruby lips were beginning to part with the regulation society simper; but on entering the great ballroom, and receiving from the master of the ceremonies a dance-programme and a bouquet, their faces became wreathed in sweetest smiles, and the escort of husbands, fathers, and brothers was abandoned with small ceremony.

There was a great sparkling of jewels. On three rows

of benches covered with red cloth, sat three hundred women, adorned with precious stones. A few heads, more modestly arrayed than others, threw out a single ray of light at each movement; but when some of those statuesque shoulders moved, there was a shower of sparks, dazzling and beautiful.

The women sat close, and their rich draperies seemed blended one with another; materials and colors were mingled in a radiant mass; and one obtained only glimpses of some brilliant bodice, a fluffy shoulder-sleeve, a flower, a rosette. But the radiance that outshone everything—glistening satins, delicate laces, transparent gauzes, the richness of raven tresses, the glory of golden curls, the snow-white gloves, the swelling throats, rounded arms and bosoms—came from magnificent jewels, a blinding, bewildering array. They set off the varied feminine charms with magical beauty; here they shone on shoulders almost anæmic in their whiteness; there they sparkled on a pearly skin, polished, without shadow or transparency; they undulated on flesh that had a pinkish tinge, as if silver-white tissue lay upon rose-tinted silk; and again they lent brightness to a smooth, even surface, indicative of a calm and moderate temperament; elsewhere was a gleam upon a velvety texture, to which heat or emotion gave a warm flush; and here, there, and everywhere they cast a superb radiance over an unparalleled array of feminine beauty, rich and glowing as ripe fruit.

All these charms blossomed forth from the low-cut, short-sleeved bodices, with the appearance of the luxu-

riousness and spontaneity of tropical flowers; this unveiled beauty, three hundred times repeated, took on an effect of general loveliness, like the splendor of a great garden; all personalities disappeared in the richness of the general effect.

Behind these benches, standing against the wall below the balcony for the orchestra, was a solid black-and-white hedge of men, each trying to discern some particular face among the glittering throng, but seeing only the splendor of the diamonds, only Woman, of which three hundred fair ones composed the radiant whole.

There was a sudden silence; the orchestra sounded the first strains of the royal march: a loud, military call, producing a strange effect in that brilliant ballroom. As if moved by a single impulse, the three hundred women arose with a tremendous rustling of silk and satin, and stood, smiling, their eyes fixed on the doors at the end of the room; the suspense seemed interminable.

Then at the doors appeared a dazzling vision, and as the Queen entered, all white and sparkling, bowing to right and left with enchanting grace, the ranks of jeweled women bent low in profound reverence. The eternal feminine in one received homage from the eternal feminine in multiplicity. The men looked on in admiration.

Standing on tiptoe, Francesco Sangiorgio tried to discover the lady of his heart. He stood among a group of deputies: the Honorable Sangarzia, who waited patiently for an opportunity to leave; the Honorable San Demetrio, who combined gallantry with diplomacy.

The sight of so many women standing in rows, inhaling the fragrance of their bouquets, and smiling as they watched the royal quadrille, bewildered Sangiorgio; he recognized no one. Never had he seen such an assemblage, such a gathering of beauty and luxury. He closed his eyes, dazzled; then, reopening them, he tried once more to distinguish the most beautiful woman—for him, the only woman.

Suddenly he espied her, while her gracious Majesty was dancing with the stout German Ambassador, her long purple velvet court train floating behind her like the tail of a comet, and her royal diadem scattering multi-colored fires

Angelica was leaning on the arm of an elderly diplomatist, with dark complexion and reddish-brown beard; she formed part of the royal quadrille, facing the fair, blonde wife of the Swedish Ambassador.

Angelica danced with the harmonious movement that was one of her greatest charms; her white brocade gown, striped with silver, fell in rich folds around her; her girlish, graceful bust rose from a bodice modestly *décolleté*, and was covered with filmy tulle. A necklace of pearls, no whiter than her skin, encircled her throat, and a diamond cross sparkled on her breast. Her chestnut hair was ornamented with diamond stars, placed irregularly, as real stars shine against the dark background of the night sky.

And the keen eye of the lover perceived, at one corner of her bodice, nestling in a rosette of tulle, a cluster of lilies-of-the-valley, a modest bouquet placed there for

the sake of their perfume and poetic suggestion, where they caught the eye of the devoted Sangiorgio.

In the midst of all this beauty, simple and modest, provoking and superb, gracious and delicate, Angelica was the image of dreamy and candid beauty; she was the type of chastity, in her white and silver gown, simple yet rich, the folds of which looked like those of a marble statue; her appropriate bodice, just concealing that fascinating, almost provoking, place where the feminine shoulder melts into the arm; her white gloves reaching to the elbows without a wrinkle. She wore no bracelets, but a single diamond shone in each ear. Her eyes beamed with a soft light as they rested on the scene around her; her transparent skin had the freshness of a child's; her cameo-like profile showed a touch of pink at the nostrils; the mobile lips were of the sweetest crimson; her whole expression was one of gentle peace, like that of a woman without hope and without desire—a kind of aureole, wholly spiritual, seemed to envelop her.

As he looked at that exquisite face, Sangiorgio felt its suggestion of sweetness and purity like a refreshing breath; it fell on his spirit like a benediction, an innocent caress, the kiss of a child, or a sister's embrace. It calmed his nerves and his excited brain; all desire vanished in a flood of infinite tenderness; this charming being was indeed for him the celestial Beatrice.

Seated in the great royal chair, the Queen leaned over a little to talk to Donna Clara Tasca, who sat beside her on a stool, which was her privilege as the wife of a Chevalier of the Annunciation. The little Sicilian, with

large, *spirituelle* eyes under her slightly gray hair, and animated face, responded vivaciously, showing respectful interest when she listened.

The other ladies of the great world—political or diplomatic—stood in groups, chatting among themselves, while attentively observing the Queen's every movement. They did not dance nor accept any invitations, but waited their turn to speak to her Majesty. Every one of them, in spite of rank, name, and power, was ambitious to obtain that one moment of supreme favor granted in the presence of two thousand spectators. They forgot their hopes, their desires, their interests, jealousies, hatreds, for the hope of a few unimportant words uttered before an envious public. Only the young girls, who could not as yet aspire to that honor, came to the ball to amuse themselves, to flirt, to show off their youth and beauty, and were now waltzing in the great ballroom, in clouds of pink, blue, and white tulle. The men came and went, stopped, chatted, and laughed among themselves.

As soon as the royal quadrille was ended, Sangiorgio made his way through a crush of silken skirts, and stopped at twenty paces from Angelica, who was talking with the deputy from Carimate, a noble lord not free from a suspicion of socialism. She appeared absorbed, but now and then her eyes rested on the fair face of the Queen.

The royal lady had risen, and a flutter stirred the groups of women; all heads were turned toward her;

all hearts beat faster; they breathed more quickly, some were silent, others talked, but in an absent way.

The Queen was surrounded by her ladies-in-waiting: two Americans, married to two Roman Princes, blond, sympathetic, and elegant; Donna Vittoria Colonna, with brilliant dark eyes; Donna Lavinia de Sora, pale and pensive; the Countess de Genzano, slender and golden-haired; the Princess Seraphita, with an angelic type of face, and dressed in white, with a simple bunch of violets; the Princess Lalla, perennially youthful, with her profile like a head on an old coin; and finally, the Duchess Paola, first lady-in-waiting, a happy mother, whose daughters were dancing in the ballroom.

Patiently the women smoothed their long gloves, folded and unfolded their feather fans, toyed with their bouquets, examined the dance-programmes for the hundredth time, as if they never had seen one before.

Now, by a slight maneuvering, Sangiorgio managed to reach Angelica's side, and murmured:

"Good evening!"

"Good evening!" she replied softly, with the expressive tone peculiar to her.

She turned toward him a little, asking him whether her husband had arrived, while he gazed at her with eyes so full of tenderness that a slight flush rose to her cheeks.

The Queen was speaking in French to the wife of the French Ambassador, a thin, dark little woman. The King talked to Signora Luisa Catalani, arrayed in black satin with a long blue feather in her blond hair.

Another quadrille opened, with a great spreading of trains; the ladies that found themselves near their Majesties danced sidewise, in order not to turn their backs on royalty; they moved with measured pace and downcast eyes.

"Do you not dance?" asked Sangiorgio.

"No, the Government does not dance this time!" Angelica replied coolly. "Later, if you like, we will have a turn."

"Later?"

"Yes, later."

At first he did not understand, so absorbed was he in gazing at her he loved. He comprehended nothing of the fever of feminine ambitions that possessed everyone near him. He was aware, however, that there was a great fluttering among the ladies; the groups grew larger, each woman impatiently awaiting the enchanting moment.

The Queen was now sitting in a window recess, and only her train and the flashing clasp of her necklace were visible, while she talked with Donna Lidia, the Prime Minister's wife, a good and charming woman who left the privacy of her home life only to appear at the more important official functions.

"That is Donna Lidia—the Queen is talking with Donna Lidia!" murmured the crowd. The conversation lasted five minutes, and, by an irresistible attraction, the eyes of all the guests were fixed upon the royal lady, following her slightest movement. Would she turn to the right or the left when she rose?

In the ballroom the couples that had danced the quadrille were promenading slowly; invitations were tendered for the next polka; the young men scribbled their names on the dance-programmes; the ladies who were strangers, or elderly, occupied the last row of benches, with the self-satisfied air of persons who allow themselves to be bored, stately and motionless in their rich laces and jewels; those who had already had the honor of a royal word, circulated about the rooms, rosy and smiling, with triumphant glances, repeating to everyone that would listen the gracious remarks vouchsafed to them, and paying no attention to the annoyance of those who were still waiting and trying to conceal their impatience. The King stood near the wife of Italy's great patriot—a beautiful brunette, dressed in palest azure.

"I hoped to see you at dinner," said Sangiorgio, as bluntly as a young collegian.

"Indeed!" replied Angelica vaguely.

Then she abruptly turned her back on him. A pathway opened in the throng in front of them, and in the wide space, between two rows of admiring subjects, the beautiful sovereign advanced majestically, her shimmering costume emitting a tremulous light like the radiance of a star. She approached Angelica. Sangiorgio stepped back, intimidated, admiring this perfect pair: the simple, serene woman, the royal, smiling woman—all that could be imagined of the power of the sex.

Later, Sangiorgio and Angelica went from room to room, slowly, stopped frequently by the long, sweeping trains that crossed their path. In the large ballroom the

young girls, and the wives of secretaries and private gentlemen, were enjoying the pleasures of the dance; the orchestra played lively music by Métra and Fahrbach. The aristocracy promenaded, sat on the sofas, talked among themselves, holding aloof from the larger throng. The British Ambassadors and her daughter—the latter like a Botticelli Madonna—held court in the Blue Room, surrounded by diplomatists. They spoke to Angelica in English. Sangiorgio did not understand what she said in reply, but the strange tongue sounded like sweetest music to him. The Countess di Malgra, a pretty blonde with bewitching eyes, propounded social paradoxes to some young deputies of the Center; Signorina Maria Gaston, the daughter of the Minister of the Navy, with the face of a worldly little cherub, babbled nonsense to several elderly admirals; and Signora Giulia Greuze, the witty Belgian, laughed under the shade of a tall shrub, showing her beautiful teeth.

Angelica, leaning on the arm of her escort, walked about, exchanging smiles and bows with the wives of the deputies: the little Marchesa di Santa Marta, her head as woolly as a sheep; the Marchesa di Corvisea, always in her red toilet, with the prettiest little feet in the Italian political world; the gentle Marchesa Costanga, with her languid air; and the two daughters of the Minister of Justice, blond and dreamy.

The Signora Clara Tasca had stayed only half an hour, but she had chatted with all the ministers, the influential men, the deputies, and had had a private talk with the Queen, she departed with her husband, whose political

fortune she would have made, had he been less nebulous, less vague, less virtuous.

Angelica spoke little, but her escort was enraptured to feel upon his arm that little hand, to be able to study the pearls on her white neck, and be touched by the folds of her gown. She was looking for her husband, without embarrassment or affectation, but with some anxiety.

At last he appeared, talking with a deputy of the Opposition. He approached his wife, bent down to her without looking at her, or even appearing to notice who accompanied her, and said in a low tone:

"And her Majesty?"

"Very amiable," she replied, looking down.

"More so than usual?"

"I do not know—I believe—it seems to me"—

"Well, are you sure—yes or no?" said Vargas severely.

"I am certain—yes, I think so," she hastened to answer.

He turned away; Angelica was pale and disturbed.

"Would you like to sit down?" murmured Sangiorgio tenderly.

"No, no! Let us walk!"

They went into a refreshment-room, where there was a great display of pastries, cakes, and bonbons, and a crowd of women nibbling at the sweetmeats and chatting with their escorts.

"I want nothing, thank you," Angelica murmured, as Sangiorgio led her toward the tables.

She tried to forget her chagrin, and talked a moment

to the wife of the Secretary-General, but she could not recover her calmness.

"Would you like to go home?" Sangiorgio inquired.

"Oh, yes!" she exclaimed quickly.

They resumed their search for Silvio; again traversed the Red Room, the Blue Room, the ballroom, the corridors; at last they found Vargas holding a conference with the British Ambassador. Angelica was about to speak to him, but he gave her a significant glance, forbidding her to interrupt him. She blushed, bowed, and withdrew quickly with her escort.

"Do you not dance?" she asked Sangiorgio, smiling. "You are much too serious. Of what are you thinking? Not of politics, I hope."

"Ah, no!"

"Do not think of politics, I beg," she said, leaning on his arm. "Are you in love, by chance?"

"Yes," he replied immediately.

She was silent, fearing she had said too much. Then she spoke of other matters—of the ball, the tapestries, the heat, the Queen—in a soft, tired voice. It was two o'clock in the morning, and the ball was at its gayest; forty couples were waltzing, and throughout the apartments was a tumultuous sea of flowing skirts, tossing curls, feminine shoulders, and brilliant eyes.

Silvio's secretary approached Angelica, saying, with an air of self-effacement:

"His Excellency is compelled to go at once to the Cabinet room, because of an important telegram. He instructed me to inform you of his sudden departure."

He waited, humbly, but with the air of one who feels himself indispensable, for her orders to accompany her home.

"Very well," she replied, dismissing him with a look.

Sangiorgio silently escorted her to the dressing-room, where, under the eyes of mute and almost automatic footmen, he assisted her to put on her heavy, ermine-lined white satin cloak. Without explanation, without a word, she took his arm, and quietly descended the grand staircase, preceded by a footman.

When they reached her carriage, she gracefully gathered up her train and entered it. She did not hold out her hand nor say "Good night," so Sangiorgio stepped into the carriage after her, in a natural way.

They drove away in silence; her silvery robe swept over Sangiorgio's knees, and he caught the perfume of the lilies-of-the-valley. Her hands were clasped, one was gloved, the other bare, showing a diamond that twinkled like a star. And, in the shadow of the carriage, which descended the Quirinal hill at a slow pace and went on its way through old Rome, Sangiorgio looked at that pale, delicate face, and those clasped hands, which seemed inert from great fatigue. Motionless, silent, in a kind of ecstasy, he felt the joy of these fleeting moments, and reveled in the bliss of heart and soul. Life seemed to him like a broad, tranquil river that flows to meet the sea, through a smiling landscape, under glorious sunlight, singing its song in the midst of flowers. Never had he been so happy, and his happiness was without alloy.

Now and then Angelica turned her eyes upon him. Nestling in her corner, in one of her graceful poses, she allowed herself to rest, with no exaggeration of either formality or abandon; she did not sleep, for her eyes often met those of the lover beside her; but her features were softened, giving her a sweeter expression; she looked like a young girl, almost a child, in her milk-white mantle, without formal cut, like the virginal vestments of a schoolgirl, and her sparkling jewels were like little stars scattered in her hair. No secret flame lighted those dark eyes, full of a maiden-like peace and purity; no smile curved those chaste lips. She, too, remained motionless, her face reserved, impenetrable, a clear oval in the obscurity of the carriage.

What was passing beneath that inflexible mask? Did it conceal ardent dreams, sad thoughts, warm desires? Did that heart ever throb violently, or was it steeped in perpetual repose? Perhaps she was like one of those great cold lakes that no tempest can disturb. Angelica remained enveloped in the mystery of her serenity.

But between those two beings—she chaste, calm, and religious, he plunged in the abyss of divine emotion—glided a third—Love!

CHAPTER XV

THE ROMAN CARNIVAL

HARDLY had Sangiorgio emerged from the Via Babuino into the Piazza del Popolo, when he felt a handful of confetti thrown into the neck of his coat, though he did not know whence it came. A faded bouquet, muddy and malodorous, struck his cheek; a rabble of boys shouted street slang at him. A dark crowd, tumultuous, shouting, excited, pressed around the great fountain, under a shower of confetti thrown by all that approached on foot, and from the large wooden balconies extending along the Corso as far as the fountain.

The brightness of a perfect spring day exhilarated everyone's spirits, and covered the square with a glittering mantle of sunshine and dust.

Sangiorgio was obliged to elbow his way through the noisy mob, and felt somewhat irritated at the brutality of their wild sport.

The people were massed before the two gates of the Pincio, and climbed to the top of the iron grating; but, though the gates were open, no one wished to go into the shaded walks of the park.

The deputy made his way with difficulty, step by step, against the current, alternately pale and red with vexation, restraining himself from striking the men that

pushed and hustled him. The great difficulty was to reach the gardens; the entrances were blocked, and every inch of space was so crowded that it was impossible to pass. What did this man mean by trying to get into the park, when everyone in the city had turned out for the carnival, from the Piazza Venezia to the Piazza del Popolo? The crowd could not understand such a foolish desire, and refused to make way for him.

Finally he shouted, in exasperation:

"Let me pass! I wish to enter the Pincio!"

At last he succeeded in passing within the gates, and uttered a sigh of relief. He walked at once toward the green avenues, and soon found himself beneath the graceful elm-trees dressed in the fresh verdure of early spring-time.

Not a pedestrian was to be seen in those deserted avenues, not a woman, nor a child; everyone was in the Corso, in the streets, at doors and windows, on the balconies, in carriages—all intoxicated with the mad frolic of the carnival.

Sangiorgio at once felt calmed and soothed in the midst of this deep peace. Occasionally faint bursts of merriment from the distant revelry came to his ears, but as he went farther and farther into the park, all sounds died away, though, as he wended his way along the parapet that commands a view of the Piazza del Popolo, he could still distinguish the confused movement of a black mass of people, under a cloud of dust and confetti—a low-hanging cloud, like those that lie upon the marshes.

An old man, plainly dressed, sat on a bench in the middle of the great esplanade that overlooks Rome, St. Peter's, Monte Mario, and the Roman Campagna. His staff had fallen to the ground, the sun shone full in his face, and he sat with closed eyes, stupefied with the heat, with fatigue and old age. Leaning against the parapet, a priest stood gazing at the panorama—a small black spot in face of the immense black area of the great city, now bathed in golden light. Sangiorgio approached the priest, who was young, thin, and pale; his face was slightly marked with the scars of smallpox; at intervals he read attentively in his breviary, a thick book bound in black, with yellowed leaves.

Sangiorgio went on his way, feeling quite safe. The lawns frequented by nurses and children, teachers, and tired housewives, were abandoned; the band-stand appeared to have been deserted for years; on the playground the skipping-ropes, the elastic balls, and the hoops, hung neglected; the red and blue wooden horses were motionless, and the merry-go-round stood still. No kind hand threw crumbs to the beautiful white swan that swam slowly around the little lake, bending its neck like a woman fatigued and ill; under the plane-trees, the marble statue of Mercury, its cheeks moulded by many rains, seemed to have slept for centuries.

On other days, the air was filled with children's cries and laughter, merry shouts and maternal warnings, but to-day all was silent, and the usual visitors of this shady spot were now a part of the noisy throng in the city streets.

Sangiorgio felt very happy in the depth of this secluded place, where everything breathed of springtime. Occasionally he cast a regretful glance at the deep woods surrounding the Villa Borghese, a most propitious retreat for timid lovers; but of course she never would dare to cross the Piazza del Popolo in the face of such a mob as it contained that day.

He waited an hour without any impatience, ignorant as yet of the torments of uncertainty, having full confidence in feminine promises.

At last she came, passing along the avenue of the Trinità dei Monti, having left her carriage in the Piazza di Spagna. She wore a dark blue gown, with a little lace veil over her face, and she walked with a light, girlish step, without lifting her skirts, as if she were gliding over the ground.

They saw each other from afar; Angelica lowered her eyes and did not hasten her steps, nor did Sangiorgio advance to meet her from the pillar against which he leaned. He stood and watched her as she drew near, admiring her in her dark gown and white veil. Was she not a flower of springtime herself—a human flower blooming for him alone, his joy and delight?

When she reached him, they did not bow, nor shake hands, nor even speak; they simply joined their steps, walking side by side in the same direction for a moment without looking at each other

"Thank you!" said Sangiorgio at last.

"No, no!" she replied quickly. Then she glanced around timidly.

"Some one may observe us here," she said nervously.

"Fear nothing! No one is here."

"No one?"

"No one, because of the carnival."

"Oh, yes—everyone is in the Corso. I too ought to have gone there."

They approached the parapet, where they could discern the eddying of the human sea in the Piazza del Popolo. Sangiorgio felt a sudden pang; it was as if this spectacle robbed him of some portion of his happiness; that throng represented to his mind the obstacles, difficulties, and trials of the future.

Angelica laid her little hand in its suède glove on the balustrade, and gazed at that distant sea of heads, from which rose a deep, continuous murmur like the rumbling of a volcano.

"How happy they are down there!" she murmured.

Sangiorgio waited a moment, feeling slightly impatient.

"Come, let us walk to the other side of the park," he said.

She turned her back to the city, and went with him down a path at the left, seeming to be lost in a day-dream.

"No, I can see no one anywhere," she said at last, in a tone of relief. "It is fortunate that this happens to be the day of the carnival. Everyone is crazy over it. Would you not prefer to be down there, too?"

"How can you believe that?" said Sangiorgio, feeling rather hurt.

"There are so many things in which I can no longer believe," she replied, in a half whisper.

"You are so good, so sweet—I do not know what to say to you. Spare me, I beg!" said Sangiorgio, with the humility of a Christian before a sacred image.

"I have something sad to say to you, my friend," said Angelica, after a slight pause. Her sweet voice was full of sympathy.

"Not to-day, not to-day! To-morrow—some other day!"

"Better to-day than to-morrow," Angelica replied, fixing her soft eyes on the woods surrounding the Villa Borghese. "You must have courage."

"No, I am not courageous—I am a coward"—

"But a man must have courage," she insisted, "in order to live at peace with his own conscience."

She gave a slight shiver as they passed near the thick shade of the Villa Medici.

"Conscience, conscience!" Sangiorgio exclaimed, taken aback. "But what of love?"

"We must not love," she declared, as if passing sentence.

"Why?"

"Because they will not allow us."

"Who will not allow us?"

"They!" she replied, pointing toward Rome, seething with mad merriment.

"But you do not know them"

"They are my conscience, however. Deceit is hateful to me."

"You do not know what it is to love!" said Francesco. "Perhaps!" and she gazed long and fixedly at Monte Mario.

"Come! Come!" Sangiorgio repeated, wishing to draw her away from the sight of the people.

And, indeed, as she once more turned her back on the panorama of Rome, her face softened and her thoughts seemed to take a less mournful turn. The quiet surroundings, the solitude, the first breath of spring, the bright sunshine, the warm air, and the tender, reverent gaze of the man beside her, gradually made her forget the outside world, and remember only the springtime, the season of love

To Sangiorgio it seemed as if their two souls were blended into one, in the midst of these flowers and trees, these singing fountains, this exquisite spot, a nestling-place on Nature's bosom.

But this sweet sensation vanished at the sight of Rome, for, at the sound of the hard and menacing voices of the crowd that floated up to their ears, he was aware that Angelica hardened her heart, and strove to be stern and inflexible.

He used all his efforts to prevent her from returning to the parapet, and the little platform that overlooked the city, and finally led her some distance from it.

"One should not love too late," Angelica resumed. "It is useless and it is painful. Where were you five years ago?"

"Over there, in the Basilicata," he replied, with a vague gesture.

"I was among the mountains and the snow. I believed that there were glaciers so huge that no one could ever climb them. I married Silvio. He was good, and I knew nothing about—sunshine. And now the sun has risen too late."

"Do not say that! Do not say it!"

"We must not turn the snow into mud, my friend."

Silence fell between them. Sangiorgio was as pale as death. Angelica's eyes were filled with tears; deeply moved, he gazed upon that sad and tearful face, but he tried to hide his pain, not knowing what to say before the grief of a woman.

"Life is hard for me," Angelica went on, in a faint voice, as if overcome by her emotion. "I have no children to warm my heart with motherly love; I have only an old man, whose heart is frozen, who loves only one thing, one idea! Oh, if you only knew, my friend, what I suffer in this eternal silence and solitude!"

"But why endure it at all?"

"Because—I must!" she answered vaguely.

They walked again very slowly. She, as if greatly fatigued, he, close upon her footsteps, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, his whole being absorbed in the thought of her.

The sun was setting brilliantly behind St. Peter's.

"It is over, my friend—it is all over. It seems to me my life is ended. The world sees my calm face, my perfect serenity, and it must never see or know of anything else—it must never suspect the truth. But there is nothing more in here for me."

She laid her hand over her heart an instant, without comprehending how much she pained her companion by her avowal of indifference. She had yielded to one of those selfish and melancholy outbursts peculiar to self-contained minds; she forgot Sangiorgio in pouring out the bitterness of her young but disillusioned soul.

"But," murmured Sangiorgio, "you can have a firm, pure friendship with one whose affection will stand any proof, one who will devote himself to you until death. Whatever you wish, he wishes; his desire to please you, humbly, secretly, knows no bound"—

He stopped, because his throbbing heart made his voice tremble and checked his speech.

"I thank you, my friend; I know it," she replied, a sweet smile lighting up her face.

"You cannot know it, for I never have told you of it; I never can tell you what I feel for you, for I express myself so badly. But I assure you it is mingled with the deepest devotion. Why reject it? Why renounce it?"

"Because it is too much like love, my friend!"

"I have not spoken to you of love."

"No, but I divined it."

"You must not divine it; you must not try to understand it. I ask nothing but that you will allow me to dedicate myself to you."

"Yes—to-day; but to-morrow love will demand love."

"Who tells you so?"

"Alas! Experience, my friend"

"Experience lies, then!" exclaimed Sangiorgio. "My love is like that of no other man."

Angelica bent her head, as if conquered, and Sangior-
gio repented his violence.

"Pardon me, Signora!" he said humbly; "the idea of
losing you is insupportable to me."

"But it must be. We must part; better now than
later, for then you would suffer more; I should be more
to blame, and you would believe you had a right to be
angry with me. Now, there is still time to avoid all
that. We are nothing to each other. We have met
only four or five times"—

"I have always known you."

"In the world of society"—

"I wept with you when you wept that day in the
Pantheon!"

"In the midst of a frivolous crowd"—

"One day I watched you a long time, while you were
at the Ponte Nomentana, and threw your rose-leaves into
the river. You were alone—*we* were alone!"

"And among the conventional formalities of political
life"—

"Ah, how beautiful you were that night of the Quirinal
ball! I went away when you left. I did not speak to
you, you said nothing to me, but how beautiful you
were!"

"It is a dream—only a dream!" said Angelica, agitated
by his passionate phrases. "We must awake; we must
part!"

"That means death, then."

"Who speaks of death?"

He did not reply, but she understood his sad look.

The sun had set, and long violet rays shot up from the horizon against the clouds; a fresh breeze had sprung up, driving away from the terrace the priest and the old man. Shadows fell in the park; from the city streets came an increased sound of cries and shouts.

Angelica took the path leading to the Trinità dei Monti, and Sangiorgio kept pace beside her, bewildered, abashed, without daring to speak, but longing to go with her to the end of the world. At the great gates, she turned to him, extending her hand.

"Good-by, my friend!"

"No, not that—not good-by!"

"It is too late!" said the adored but glacial voice.

And Angelica was lost in the mists of twilight.

The moment had come to light the innumerable candles, from the Piazza del Popolo to the Piazza di Venezia.

There was a myriad of these bright points, these wandering flames and dancing sparks, in the streets, on the balconies, at the windows.

Pandemonium reigned, amid the tossing of muddy bouquets, a waving of handkerchiefs and rags, a fluttering of fans, all kinds of jokes and pranks indulged in to extinguish one another's candles; and when any one cried out in resistance or attack, there was a new roar of "Candles! Candles! Candles!"

Through this sea of lights, this bedlam of noise and merriment, a sad being, racked with grief, made his way, unconscious of being pushed and elbowed and jostled.

CHAPTER XVI

A FLOWER ON THE CURRENT

THREE times they had met on the great road, bordered with elms and plane-trees, that runs beside the Tiber. Angelica would leave her carriage before arriving at the Ponto Milvio, sending her coachman away with orders to wait for her at Saint Peter's; then she would cross the bridge on foot and walk a hundred paces or so, glancing hurriedly here and there.

Sangiorgio was always waiting for her; he had been waiting two hours, wild with impatience and longing to see her, striding to and fro near the Albergo Morteo, walking a few steps down the Via di Tor di Quinto, turning back to go a short distance along the Flaminian Way, then coming back again, casting vague glances in all directions: at the willows drooping over the stream, at the flowering almonds springing up behind the hedges of the Farnesina; then from afar he would see her approaching, and the blood would rush to his pale cheeks.

He did not go to meet her, but waited to hear her light footfall, affecting abstraction and unconcern.

She usually arrived after breaking three or four appointments with him, and was nearly always an hour and a half late, but she never attempted to excuse herself, or to offer any apology for these vagaries; and

Sangiorgio met her without reproach or criticism, calmed by her mere presence, rewarded by that instant of supreme joy for all his past anxiety.

They always felt a slight, strange embarrassment at the moment of meeting; they knew not what to say, but turned and strolled slowly beneath the branches of the trees, she with her eyes cast down, a serious and preoccupied air, and hands hidden in her muff, he, stifled with his emotion, twirling his extinguished cigar between his fingers, abashed, happy, but speechless.

The beautiful Roman spring verdure was daily spreading, from the cypress of the Monte Mario to the plane-trees of the Monti Parioli, and the white hawthorn bloomed everywhere.

Angelica's first words were usually sad and full of regret; brief, significant words, which fell like lead on the young man's heart. He remained humble and silent, not knowing how to console this virtuous and pious woman, whose conscience was so troubled with remorse. Then, yielding to a natural compassion, she would moderate her words of complaint, her repentance seemed more vague, her anger softened.

"She suffers for me! Then she must love me!" said Sangiorgio to himself in the madness of his passion.

But never had she spoken to him one word of love, and never had he had sufficient boldness to ask for it. A certain timidity and shamefacedness always restrained him. Perhaps he feared the answer—the calm and cruel answer of a frank woman who did not love him.

And so, in their singular intimacy, it came to be tacitly

understood that his princess should dwell, aloof and indifferent, in her ivory tower, allowing him to love and worship her without expecting any return. She was the sacred image sometimes deigning to cast her gracious glance upon the faithful one kneeling at her feet, receiving his blessings for her infinite kindness.

The silvery river wound its way under the trees on its banks, and the air was filled with the sweet scent of springtime. Sangiorgio finally dared to speak to Angelica of the feeling in his heart, beginning with short, broken phrases of passion, telling her all that he had thought and felt since their last meeting; and the fire of his glance made her tremble.

Gradually the sound of his own voice calmed him; he recovered his self-possession and spoke in more natural tones; his ideas flowed more freely, and he went on with so much simple eloquence and sincerity that Angelica, touched, regained her own serenity, and her cheeks flushed like those of a young girl.

Sometimes she gathered green branches, great dark poppies, clusters of white currants, transparent as lace, or those red, poisonous berries, so brilliant, that grow by the wayside; and Sangiorgio spoke to her of love while she gathered all these, and suddenly appeared glad to listen to him, sometimes offering him a flower from her bouquet. He would hold it fast, seized with a strange desire to bite it; one day he said he wished to eat the scarlet berries, so bright and tempting to look at.

"Do you wish to die, then, my friend?" said Angelica, half in jest and half in fear.

This betrayal of concern for him was one of the sweet thoughts that helped to cheer Sangiorgio's yearning heart.

One day she stood on tiptoe to reach a branch of flowering almond, in the blossoms of which she buried her face with a deep breath. In Sangiorgio's eyes she herself seemed the very spirit of springtime. She gave him the branch, and he laid it away with some withered lilies-of-the-valley, a bit of cloth of one of her gowns, begged for and granted as a great favor, and—precious, inestimable treasure!—a little handkerchief, bordered with fine old lace, which she had given to him one evening when he was in despair, after waiting three days for her in vain.

These evidences of adoration did not displease her. She would walk beside him, her eyes fixed afar off, on the Castel Sant' Angelo, or on old Rome, where evening lights began to appear; and she listened quietly while her lover poured his tender words into her ear, sometimes nodding like a pleased child.

By the time they reached the end of their walk, each felt calm and at peace with all the world; and they went their separate ways, after a long leave-taking full of tenderness.

One day she arrived at the rendezvous all trembling, having just encountered the Honorable Giustini, the sneering Tuscan, half-hunchbacked, half-lame, who flaunted everywhere his dreary cynicism and his shattered frame.

Her carriage had passed him rapidly, but Giustini had

had time to recognize her and to salute her, with a look of surprise. Her terror was so great that she kept looking behind her, thinking that every peasant she saw was Giustini, and looking at Sangiorgio with frightened eyes. He tried in vain to reassure her, arguing that a pedestrian could not follow a swift-moving carriage, and that the Flaminian Way was a public thoroughfare, where her presence in her own carriage could not be regarded as remarkable.

But he too felt that vague terror that sometimes seizes upon lovers in their happiest moments, poisoning all the sweetness of their joy. That day their minds could not unite in their usual peaceful bliss, and Angelica summarized her apprehensions by saying:

"Now Giustini is in the Chamber, and is telling everyone, even my husband, that he met me on the Flaminian Way."

In that painful hour Sangiorgio ventured to suggest that the public highway was not a suitable or a safe place for their meetings; they should seek the seclusion of some house, between four walls, far removed from the indiscreet and curious gaze of passers-by. He made this suggestion with so much respectful feeling and such true concern for her safety, that she could not force herself to be angry at him. She answered with a simple *No!* spoken slowly but firmly, without anger or faltering. When he ventured to plead still further, she said quickly: "Hush! Hush!"

He was silenced, and for the time he said no more. But the fatal encounter with Giustini made him realize

fully the danger of these public meetings, under the possible gaze of the grinning waiters of the Morteo Caffè, or the tax-gatherers at the Porta Angelica.

Two further meetings were fully as unpleasant; Angelica trembled at the sight of a cart or a soldier; the small boats on the Tiber alarmed her; she fancied the oarsmen recognized her and raised their oars to salute her.

They could not talk quietly any more. When Sangiorgio attempted to speak of love, she would interrupt him, look narrowly at the passers-by, lowering her head, alternately blushing and paling, when an occasional carriage rolled along, and breathing rapidly after it had passed.

One day a severe storm came up, about an hour before the time appointed for their meeting. Sangiorgio took refuge under the wide doorway of the Morteo Caffè, but, unable to control his impatience, he ventured out in the rain, trying to see whether Angelica was coming in the distance.

He saw no one, and of course he knew she would not come out in such abominable weather; nevertheless he waited, cherishing a secret hope in his heart. She did not appear, and he returned to Rome at seven o'clock, in an open tramcar, his feet on the damp floor, wet to the skin, his heart aching with sadness and disappointment, and a touch of fever in his blood.

At the next meeting, he repeated his suggestion. She still said *No!* but with less emphasis, less decision of manner.

It was late and the air was very cold. It was one of those freezing days of January transported into April, with a biting wind, a gray sky, a wet and soaking soil. Angelica's only wrap was a little velvet cape which barely covered her neck and shoulders, so that she was soon chilled through. She held her handkerchief up to her face. Sangiorgio, too, felt very cold in his thin topcoat, but he did not speak of that, only saying:

"You are very cold, are you not?"

"Yes, yes!" she murmured.

"Oh, heavens!" he said helplessly, trying to think of some means to bring her warmth and comfort.

They hastened their steps, but Angelica's thin shoes and the edge of her skirt became damp and muddy. Instinctively he spoke again of the pleasure it would be to have a warm room, a place as warm as her own boudoir in the Piazza dell' Apollinare, where they might sit comfortably and talk before a good fire. For a moment Angelica made no reply.

"Where?" she finally asked, after a significant silence.

"Somewhere over there," he replied, with a vague gesture toward Rome.

They said no more. Night fell, dark and melancholy, over the deserted Campagna. Angelica felt so sad and so timid that, for the first time, she slipped her hand through the arm of her friend, who felt his heart throb with gratitude at this favor.

Then three long days passed without a meeting. Silvio Vargas told Sangiorgio at the Chamber that Angelica was ill.

On the fourth evening he found her alone in her box at the Apollo; she was pale and appeared ill. She opened wide her large feather fan, and whispered to him behind it that on her return from their last rendezvous, she had met the Honorable Oldofredi in the Piazza San Pietro, and that he had stared her in the face with a malicious grin. Oldofredi was well known to be vindictive.

At last, blushing for shame, she confessed to a doubt as to the good faith of her coachman and her maid; she felt sure they were watching her. Then, seeing that her friend looked hopelessly saddened and bewildered, she added quickly:

"I will go! I will go wherever you please!"

CHAPTER XVII

LOVE'S SANCTUARY

WHEN Sangiorgio returned to his lodgings in the Via Angelo Custode, he felt a touch of fever in his blood. The promise Angelica Vargas had given him had turned his head and put fire in his heart.

His sitting-room seemed cold and disagreeable, with its damp, close odor, and he felt a shudder of disgust on entering it. He extinguished the light, that he might not see the sordid surroundings, and threw himself, still dressed, on his bed, thinking of the place in which he should receive the adored being.

His excited imagination could fix upon no exact idea; his half-open eyes seemed to see a succession of warm, fragrant rooms, with heavy curtains, and thick carpets that deadened all footfalls; but he had no idea where he was to find these rooms. Sometimes he decided that they must be in the neighborhood of the Janiculum, or in the Piazza di Spagna; again, he decided upon the Via Sistina or the Piazza Navone. This indecision irritated him. Where were the doors to these rooms—the stairway, the windows?

He fancied he could see their walls covered with pale pink silk, the rich hue of a velvet armchair, the metallic scintillation of a Damascus blade, the delicate tracery of

a length of old yellow lace, but all was confused in his mind, everything was seen as in a mental fog.

Where would Angelica sit when she arrived at this mysterious house? Where would she rest her tired feet? Where would she lean her arm? At times the rooms seemed empty, without chairs, table, or divans—vast and empty as a desert.

His visions made him sigh deeply, as if in pain; a nightmare-like constriction of the chest oppressed him, and his head burned with fever. Lying thus on his bed, in a sort of waking dream, his heart aching with love's sweet pain, he feared to move, lest his blissful visions should escape him, and Angelica's promise also.

Presently his dream changed and assumed various phases, sometimes tragic and sometimes comic. He imagined he had been waiting for Angelica a long, long time, and that she never, never came. The white curtains became yellow, then gray, with age; moths had eaten the coverings, which hung in strips; the furniture had become so old it no longer stood erect; in the bottom of the flowerpot was a mass of ashes that once had been flowers; the walls reeked with dampness. And he, the faithful lover, had become an old man, a centenarian, bent, half blind, and with a long white beard. But she never, never came, and he continued to wait, always patient, always lovelorn. At last a resonant voice seemed to thunder thrice: *Angelica is dead! Angelica is dead! Angelica is dead!* At the first cry, the furniture crumbled into bits; at the second, the old man himself dropped dead, with arms outstretched and face

upon the ground; at the third, the walls fell in, making a tomb of the house that Angelica never had deigned to visit.

Again, he would be possessed with a distracted fancy that it was the day appointed for the first rendezvous in the new apartment, and that he had totally forgotten the hour agreed upon. Was it for two o'clock, three o'clock, or four o'clock? He thought he rushed to Montecitorio at noon, so that he would be sure to finish in time, but the old Prime Minister stopped him in the corridor, and, stroking his white moustache, insisted upon talking to him about the Basilicata, of the tax on salt, the condition of the peasants, and a dozen things which he hardly heard, in his absence of mind.

No sooner had he shaken off the Prime Minister than he ran across Giustini, whose slight hump had enormously increased, and who held him fast while he talked about Rome—that mysterious Rome which seemed to be sleeping.

Time passed swiftly. Finally he escaped from the Tuscan deputy and ran to the Piazza Colonna, where he heard a feminine voice calling to him from the window of a closed carriage. He turned, and saw two large, lustrous dark eyes, crimson lips, delicate hands—the glowing face of Elena Fiammanti, who had loved him. She called:

“Come! Come with me! Dost thou remember our first meeting at the Janiculum, on Christmas Day? Dost thou remember the night of the masked ball, and the moonlight in the Piazza di Spagna? Dost thou remem-

ber the roses I left in thy room—the kiss I gave thee at the theater after the duel? Dost thou remember all my kisses and all my love? Then come with me! I am joy and happiness! Never will I cause thee tears or suffering. Come! tell me all thy griefs, and I will comfort thee, but will not tell my own sorrows, lest I should sadden thy heart.”

But he bent his head, covered his ears, closed his eyes, that he might not hear the voice of this temptress or see her alluring face. He murmured “Angelica!” and Elena vanished, with a reproachful glance.

Then he ran and ran, yet seemed to make no progress; carriages got in his way, friends stopped him, crowds surrounded him, dogs ran past him and nearly tripped his feet. He ran and ran, panting, leaping across streams, crossing streets, losing his way.

Finally, flushed and breathless, he arrived at the right house; but on the sidewalk in front of it he beheld the Honorable Oldofredi pacing to and fro, as if on guard; he gazed at Sangiorgio with a sardonic smile, ugly, hateful, implacable.

The house was Number 62, Piazza di Spagna. In front of it a flower-seller had established herself, with her flat basket filled with pale violets, double roses, and fragrant jonquils.

The stairway was dark; three doors opened on the first landing, which was also dim and mysterious; on the middle door Sangiorgio’s card was fastened by two pins.

Within was a small anteroom, in which Noci, the fa-

mous upholsterer and decorator, had placed an old oaken marriage-chest, delicately carved, on which was laid a long cushion of red and yellow silk. Three or four chairs and a table were disposed about the room. A bronze lamp was suspended from the ceiling, which, as well as the walls, was covered with painted canvas.

The drawing-room had a large window, giving a fine view of the square; this room was large and light, and full of sunshine; draperies of old rose and pale green damask fell over creamy lace inside curtains, agreeably softening the glare of light.

The walls were covered with light brown satin, and were still further ornamented by Persian shawls and old embroideries, artistically draped, and held in place by a glittering brass shield, a silver scimitar, or fan-shaped clusters of peacocks' feathers.

A fragrant sandal-wood rosary, such as Turkish women love to run through their idle fingers, hung in one corner; in another, a great white veil, studded with silver spangles, was gracefully arranged

But the most original decoration was a large square piece of yellow damask, of the period of the Renaissance, a kind of oriflamme, on which was appliquéd a Latin cross of black velvet. This strange ornament was in striking contrast to its brown background.

There was no furniture of wood, not a table, even, with sharp angles; everything was padded and draped with velvet, silk, or satin. In slender opalescent vases were clusters of purple, white, and blue hyacinth; a rare orchid in a Japanese vase languidly shed its leaves. On

an immense divan was a huge pile of down cushions, covered with silk in all shades of red, scarlet, amaranth, deep pink—every tint from that of the heart of a white rose to the richest wine-color.

The two windows of the bedroom looked out on the Piazza di Spagna. This apartment was a sort of second drawing-room, furnished with deep-blue velvet hangings, bordered with broad bands of silver.

There was no bed—only a very wide, low couch, over which was thrown a blue velvet cover, in the center of which was the letter *A*, in elongated and fanciful design. Overhead, at one end of the couch, a blue velvet canopy, of a shade like the midnight sky and covered with silvery stars, was arranged in a peculiar triangular shape, throwing a discreet, mysterious shadow on the couch below. Several pretty little pieces of furniture, in the style of the Pompadour, brightened the general effect of the room.

The dressing-room was hung with cream-colored cashmere, and on a toilet-table draped with snowy muslin lay a set of toilet articles in oxidized silver, between two large white azaleas, in full bloom.

The decorator had furnished the rooms in four days, in obedience to the impatience of Sangiorgio, who could hardly contain himself to act reasonably, but wandered restlessly about, like an unquiet spirit.

When all was finished, he felt a mingling of joy and uneasiness. What would she think of this mysterious and luxurious rendezvous? Would her chaste and pure imagination be offended at such a display of Oriental

voluptuousness? That profusion of cushions, from deepest crimson to faintest pink—were they not too direct an invitation to repose—the perfidious repose that leads to the surrender of the soul?

The bedroom was handsome in its severity of style, but would his beloved ever enter it? Sangiorgio was happy, yet his mind was troubled; he had wished for a lovers' retreat, and he had gained it, but now these quiet rooms, perfumed, with an air of sacredness, upset his former ideals, or rather, they evoked another ideal—more vivid, more human.

Francesco Sangiorgio, seated before a bright fire, awaited Angelica Vargas. To go to the rendezvous in the new apartment had been for several days his only thought, his sole occupation. But Angelica, regretting her concession by this time, and deterred by various scruples, refused to come, suspicious of him and distrustful of love, and fearing to meet in that street some one she knew. But, without revealing her fears and suspicions in words, she took refuge in the apathy of a virtuous woman, indifferent, tranquil, cured of all impulsive flights of fancy. Sangiorgio felt irritated and indignant at her suspicions, and her sweet, gentle obstinacy only added fuel to the ardor of his desires.

Finally a deep bitterness against feminine injustice entered his soul. One evening, distracted with grief and anger, he said to her in a trembling voice:

"Come! tell me what you fear! Are you not invincible

in yourself? Have I not always obeyed your least wish? Do you not understand, Angelica, that you run no risk with me? You yourself are your own defence. You are without weakness, without sin."

She raised her face, flushed with pride and courage.

"I will go!" she said, like a heroine sure of her victory.

"When?"

"I don't know—one of these days—you know which are my free hours."

She would not be more precise, finding it very natural to make him wait and expect; like all women, she thought only of her own sacrifice, quite ignoring that of another.

Every day, in the beautiful April weather, Sangiorgio passed several hours in the little drawing-room of the Piazza di Spagna. He rose rather late in his horrible lodgings in the Via Angela Custode, and dressed leisurely, sipping at a cup of very bad coffee brought to him by the servant. He did not touch a book or a pen, but made haste to leave that disgusting abode as soon as possible.

Through the instinct of curiosity, he went first to Montecitorio for his letters, but he went no more to the reading-room, nor did he stop to chat in the corridors.

Some of his colleagues said to him, when by chance he met them:

"What has become of you of late? We never see you any more. Why do you not attend the sessions?"

"I am very much engaged with work," he would say, pensively, passing his hand over his forehead.

Or some one would say:

"I suppose you have been away on a trip to the Basilicata, Sangiorgio. How about your agricultural report—is it finished?"

"Yes, yes! I have been in the Basilicata," he would reply, his face flushing. "The report—oh, yes, it will soon be finished; it is a tremendous piece of work, though," he would add.

He tried to elude such questions, as he did not know how to lie, and they troubled him. He would leave Montecitorio as quickly as he could, reading his letters without really comprehending their meaning, indifferent to the demands of his constituents or to the recommendations of the officials in his province.

Until then, he had been a model deputy, performing his duties with perfect regularity, rendering services to influential persons or to those who might be useful to himself, rewarding this man with a promise, that one with a good word, always able and adroit. But now all this sort of thing bored him. He thought only of the sweet nest of love where his adored lady had promised to come, and with a nervous movement, he would shrug his shoulders and thrust his letters into his pocket.

He went to breakfast at the Caffè Colonna, alone, absorbed in his dream, barely tasting the food set before him; and if ever his conscience reproached him for not replying to the urgent letters he received, he would order writing materials, and, at a corner of the table, while his beefsteak grew cold, he would dash off a few hasty lines on a scrap of paper. He soon grew weary of this,

however, and then he would pay his bill and go away. Often his letters would lie in his desk several days, until it was too late to answer them.

At one o'clock he was always in the Piazza di Spagna, buying flowers of all the flower-girls, loading himself with roses, hyacinths, and violets, and hastening to the house to meet Angelica, who might perhaps have just arrived at the door.

He always enjoyed a delicious sense of contentment when he entered that calm, rich, luxurious retreat. Certainly she would come—had she not promised? And he would bustle about like an amorous youth of twenty, to light the fire, delighted when the wood caught and blazed up brightly.

Then he moved about the apartment, arranging bouquets, changing the water in the vases, throwing away the faded flowers, tying up clusters of roses with violets or hyacinths, and then untying and rearranging them, never satisfied, and occupying himself over these details with amazing activity.

He wandered from one room to the other; the sight of the low divan in the bedroom made his heart throb; he returned to the armchair before the fire in the drawing-room—and waited.

He waited there throughout the long spring afternoons, alone, motionless, gazing at the flying sparks, the bright flames, the capricious flight of the smoke, and then the dying embers. His eyes followed mechanically the life and death of each brand; and while his whole being glowed with love for the adored one, the fire, too,

consumed itself with its own ardor and fury. The blaze was always at its best at the hours when Angelica might come, and at that time, in the heart of the lover, as well as in the fire, was a temperature that was ready to meet anything, courage or metal.

She might come at any moment; perhaps even now she was tremblingly mounting the stairs. Sangiorgio would close his eyes at the thought, overcome with emotion. Every day, from four o'clock to six, his nerves underwent the same strain of excitement and suspense, while the fire kindled, blazed, and died in the hearth.

Then twilight fell; hope failed in the lover's heart; the light grew dim, the coals became black, and the dark pall of night descended on the earth, on the fire, on love!

He would leave the house at half-past seven, and walk slowly along, a chill at his heart, his face pale and down-cast, but cherishing always in his soul the divine hope of victory, the blessed hope of being loved.

He could meet Angelica in the morning only among gatherings of people, and never had an opportunity to talk quietly with her now; but he renewed his courage by reading the expression in her eyes, which seemed to say:

"Wait for me! Wait for me a little longer! I shall come!"

The next day, notwithstanding his former disappointments, he would hasten at noontime to the little apartment in the Piazza di Spagna, and would remain there until after eight o'clock. Sometimes, while he sat be-

fore the dying fire, a drowsiness seized him, and for a time he would be lost in a feverish, agitated sleep, from which he would wake with a start, thinking he had heard the outside bell ring. But it was only a dream—Angelica never came.

A still greater trial was reserved for him. Formerly he was at liberty to seek her anywhere—at the Chamber, at a lecture, out walking, and he could occasionally even find a pretext for visiting her at her home, or to stop her husband, Silvio Vargas, and at least ask about her.

But now all that was over. He was compelled to wait for her, shut within four walls, reduced to absolute inaction, to utter powerlessness, while others, who were not in love with her, in whom she felt no interest, any stupid fellow, the first comer, might meet her, salute her, talk to her. Not long before, he had gone about everywhere, chatted with his fellow members; interested himself in public matters, listened to the discussions of his colleagues—in short, had lived. But now he was immured, cut off from existence; he appeared for a moment at Montecitorio to get his mail, then he flew to his nest of love, which swallowed him up, smothering his thoughts and his will, his activity and his energy.

In the evenings, when he roamed from place to place, from ball to concert, from concert to the theater, in the hope of meeting Angelica, the world of society seemed almost an unknown region to him, since for so long a time he had seen nothing, heard nothing, and had not even read a newspaper. His acquaintances were beginning to say:

"That Sangiorgio—he seemed to be such a strong fellow—surprising change in him."

"Like all Southerners; a blaze of straw, and a great deal of smoke."

"Sangiorgio's day is over."

He was aware of this feeling toward him, this sentiment half pitying, half triumphant over his apparent failure in public life.

He felt a wall of ice slowly rising around him, and comprehended that his new passion was drawing him farther and farther away from his great passion of the past—his adored politics.

He was conscious of all this, yet was willing to make the sacrifice. He was neither a victim nor a rebel, but a joyous martyr, happy to feel the fire of youth in his veins, delighting in his sufferings.

A kind of wild and melancholy voluptuousness possessed him every morning when he left the busy and burning streets to shut himself up in those cool rooms and wait. Like a fanatical worshiper of Buddha, he ascended and descended all degrees of self-annihilation, until at last he reached a complete and bitter abstraction of suffering, a Nirvana that was full of divine pain.

It was the first morning in May—a fair, sunny, fragrant morning—and the chimes of the Trinità dei Monti rang joyously

Sangiorgio had just entered his temple of love, laden with roses, his face pale and sad, his appearance as melancholy as an autumn evening on the Roman Campagna.

He was arranging his flowers in the vases when a light ring at the bell made him flush and tremble, and brought to his eyes hot tears that fell on the carpet.

"It is I—yes, it is I!" whispered Angelica, as she glided into the room.

She entered swiftly and threw herself into an armchair, still murmuring:

"It is indeed I!"

Sangiorgio stood before her, gazing at her without daring to speak, without even finding courage enough to thank her.

The lovely woman had kept her promise, and had come to him with the advent of the month of flowers and of prayers to the Virgin; and, without saying a word, Sangiorgio gathered all the roses in the apartment, and, with a gesture of adoration, he showered her with them, until her light gown was covered with the fragrant blossoms.

"I have delayed a long time in coming," she murmured, bending her charming head beneath this torrent of perfume, "but I could not help it."

And she made a movement of fatigue. With a look, he entreated her not to offer any excuse; his happiness was too perfect, too complete, to allow him to trouble her with a single reproach or one bitter word.

Angelica wore a gown of the most delicate shade of gray, with a drooping white plume on her hat and a white lace veil over her dark eyes. She had sunk into one of the large armchairs, and sat in an attitude of careless grace, her lap full of roses, with one hand resting

caressingly on the flowers, and the other hanging idle at her side.

Sangiorgio drew a chair near to her, lifted the inert little hand, and carried it to his lips. She did not appear to notice his action.

"It is very pretty here," she said calmly, as if she were making a call in any ordinary drawing-room. "Yes, it is very pretty, indeed "

"I remembered that you said you liked the Piazza di Spagna," he replied

"I prefer it to any other street. You did well to come here. I never have been able to find an apartment here. Old Rome, where I live, is so dismal, so ugly! That is the reason why I go out so much—I have a sort of horror of my own house."

"Come and live here!" he said, smiling.

"I should like to if I could," she replied, with perfect simplicity, "but that is impossible. I must go on living over there, in the gloomy old place. How bright it is here—so sunny and beautiful! Are you not happy here, my friend?"

"Happy—yes!" he replied, with deep significance.

"May God bless you!" she said in a half whisper, as if she breathed a prayer. Then she inhaled a deep breath of the fragrance of a glowing rose.

"Besides," she resumed after a moment, "there is the charm of contrast here, with the white palaces, the beautiful fine-art shops, and that great, severe, gray building so near, with its awe-inspiring inscription: *Propaganda of the Faith*. Propaganda of the Faith! There is something

grand and mysterious in those words—like a pardon or a divine call. I hope that you are a believer, my friend.”

“If you believe, Angelica, I, too, believe.”

“It is so vulgar to be an atheist! Religion is beautiful and good; it is more precious than most of the things that the world admires. Have you ever visited the churches in Rome?”

“I have visited some of the basilicas as a matter of artistic curiosity.”

“Oh, yes—but those are great, empty churches that do no real good. You should see the little Roman chapels, where people really go to pray. There is one up there, the Trinità, where men sing every Sunday behind a *grille*. Ah, what divine music! They are invisible, but when one listens to them it seems as if their very souls exhaled in melody all their sorrows and joys. Shall we go to hear them together some day?”

“I will go wherever you wish.”

“I should like to have you think and feel as I do—to like whatever I like.”

“I love you!” he exclaimed, with the stifled voice he always used in speaking of his passion.

“Hush! You promised not to say anything like that,” she murmured, blushing.

“Ah, sometimes my feeling is stronger than my will! Let me say it, Angelica! Be kind—you who are sweetness itself! I love you—I love you so much that it is killing me. I am all alone—I have no one else in the world—and I love you, Angelica!”

She did not reply, but lightly, like the sweep of a bird’s

wing, like a leaf blown by the wind, she passed her hand over his flushed face. He was silent, a little abashed, a trifle piqued, but his face felt cooled and refreshed by that light caress. She smiled with a touch of playful malice before asking him this question:

"Is it true that you once loved Elena Fiammanti?"

"No, never!"

"Well, then, she was in love with you."

"I do not think so."

"You never lie, do you?"

"Never!"

"I believe that Elena did love you. She has a light and changeable nature, but a good, tender and affectionate heart. I rarely see her. She prefers men's society to women's. Tell me truly, now—were you never in love with her?"

"I never have loved anyone but you, Angelica."

"Let us not speak any more of love, my friend; or if I do speak of it, do not answer me—let me talk without interruption. I long to think aloud, so to speak, in the presence of some one who understands me, who pities me, who has some tenderness for me. But sympathy—that is what I long for—you will be indulgent toward me, will you not, dear friend?"

"Angelica! Angelica! do not talk like that!"

"Why not? Sometimes I feel like a child again; I forget my rôle of a serious woman, a really grown-up person. I become timid, fearful, superstitious, full of childish extravagances and inexplicable caprices. In society I appear always calm, because that is my duty;

but in my hours of privacy—hours filled sometimes with vague sadness or causeless joy—those feelings that no one can give a reason for—I need some one to sympathize with me. Will you be my friend, Sangiorgio?"

She clasped her little hands with a supplicating air. Sangiorgio leaned over and touched her pure white forehead with a kiss so light, so sweet and tender, so full of sympathy, that she felt tears come to her eyes, and for a moment she wept silently, deeply moved.

"Do not weep, Angelica," said Sangiorgio, in a changed voice, "do not weep, I beg!"

"Yes, let me—let me! It will relieve my heart; I never dare to weep at home. I will stop soon and then I will weep no more, but will be cheerful again."

He was silent, agitated by her tears, vanquished by her grief, which overcame him with a strangely penetrating seductiveness, an almost irresistible abandonment to his impulses. When Angelica had first entered his rooms, calm, smiling, as much at ease as if she were in her own house or that of a friend, he had been able to assume the same manner and not to speak a word of love; but in the presence of her weakness, hearing her sob over her incurably wounded heart, her lost dreams, her buried youth, and seeing the tears she rained upon that tomb, he felt an overmastering longing to clasp her in his arms, and to hold her to his breast forever.

He bent his head, that he might not see the sad face, the tender breast that panted like that of a bird. Wearied at last, she gradually grew calmer, though the sad-

ness did not leave her face. He saw that her handkerchief was wet with her tears.

"Pardon me!" she said, after a time, as if just remembering his presence.

"Do not speak of that; am I not your friend?"

"Alas! I am only a very melancholy kind of friend," Angelica replied, with a mournful smile. "I fear I shall not bring much happiness into your life."

"But I love you thus; I love you just as you are; I love you because of your sadness!" he declared vehemently.

Angelica remained silent a moment, her eyes fixed on a ray of sunlight that shot through the creamy lace curtain, played over the carpet, and struck a note of vivid color on one of the scarlet cushions. She seemed struck with a sudden thought, and rose abruptly.

"I must go now."

"No, no!" protested Sangiorgio, in despair, as if he had thought such an event must never happen.

"But I must," she repeated, seriously.

"Why?" he asked, like a child.

"Oh—because!" said she, smiling at the simplicity of the question.

"But stay a little longer—you have only just come."

"I have been here a whole hour, and it is growing late."

"Only a little longer!" he pleaded.

"I must not; I assure you that I have stayed too long already."

"Just five minutes! What difference can that make?"

"Nothing important, perhaps, but of what use would that be? A minute more or less is nothing."

"Oh, do not torture me, Angelica! Be kind! give me five minutes more!"

"Very well, but you are altogether too exacting," she said, yielding to him, with a shake of the head like a mother bestowing a bonbon upon a child.

They remained standing opposite each other near the door of the drawing-room, she slightly annoyed and impatient to go, and he confused and repentant at having detained her. A sudden apprehension cast a shadow over Sangiorgio's face.

"Shall you never come here again?" he asked.

"Yes, I will come again," she replied.

"Ah, you say that, but you will not do it," he exclaimed, in agitation, unable to overcome this idea. "Why deceive me? You are going away, and I never shall see you here again! I have a presentiment of it—I feel it!"

"I shall come again, I tell you—I surely shall come here again," Angelica repeated, in the sweet, calm voice that always had power to soothe him. And, in order to set his mind at rest, she looked into his eyes with one of her sweetest, kindest smiles, which wholly reassured him.

"Promise it, then! Will you promise me to come again?"

"Yes, I promise."

"By all that you hold most sacred in the world?"

"By all that I hold most sacred in the world!"

"And when will you come again?" asked Sangiorgio.

"That I cannot say; you know I am not free."

"Return soon, Angelica! Oh, can you not mention some day, some hour?"

"To what purpose? Does it bore you so much to wait for me? Are you not at home here?"

"Yes, but at least name some possible day—"

"Oh, then, you do not wish to wait for me! You have more amusing things to do!"

"No, Angelica, nothing."

"Well, then?"

"Well—if you but knew, my sweet friend, the bitterness I feel at not knowing when I shall see you again. This vague expectancy is a torment, a nightmare, an agony that you would pity could you but realize it. Even if you mean to deceive me, Angelica, at least name the day!"

"Let me see! To-day is Sunday," she said, reflecting. "It cannot be to-morrow, nor the day after, nor Wednesday—no, all my time is engaged. Thursday, perhaps—yes, you may count on Thursday."

"Not before?"

"Who can tell? Perhaps for a minute, in passing, I may run in. But Thursday, without fail. Now good-by, my friend!"

"Oh, stay!" he still entreated, holding fast to her hand.

"Come, come! You are really childish—good-by!" And she glided swiftly down the stairs, free at last

Sangiorgio felt as if part of his life had gone with her, as if his heart's blood were flowing from an open wound.

Without a further glance at the rooms, he seized his hat and left the house hastily, in the wild hope of overtaking Angelica.

The Piazza di Spagna, full of sunlight and of people, dazzled him, and instinctively he turned into the Via Condotti, but could not descry the gray gown and the white veil.

He turned back toward the Palace of the Propaganda of the Faith, as the name still lingered in his mind, but she was not there.

He wandered through all the streets of the neighborhood, perturbed and breathless, spurred on by the invincible desire to obtain one more glimpse of the being who had appeared to vanish in the sunlight.

During a whole hour he sought her in the Via Babuino, the Via di Due Macelli, the Via Sistina, near the Villa Medici and the Pincio; everywhere, in short, devoured by a feverish energy that prevented him from feeling weary.

Finally he arrived in the Piazza del Popolo, alone, feeling a little calmer, but with tired feet and weary brain. It must be late, very late, he thought; he felt all the physical and moral lassitude that follows agitating experiences.

He drew out his watch; it was barely half-past one; there was still half a day to pass away somehow. Slowly, mechanically, in obedience to his former habit, he turned his steps toward the Chamber, following the Corso, with a bored expression, without a glance at the handsome Roman *bourgeoise* women returning home from

mass, and not recognizing anyone in the cloud of golden dust of that bright Sunday in May.

Sangiorgio felt that he must seek refuge in the Parliament House, not knowing where else to go in his distress of mind and body. He wished to find a quiet, cool corner, where he could think, dream, and remember. It was an hour when many deputies were going and coming near Montecitorio, returning from luncheon at the Colonna, the Parlamento, the Fagiano, or the Sorelle Venete. Sangiorgio absently acknowledged several salutations, and caught in passing several scraps of conversation which he did not understand. Fortunately, there was a session that day.

He went to his accustomed seat, mechanically arranged his papers before him, and listened to the sonorous voice of the secretary, Sangarzia, reading the order of proceedings. What was he talking about? The words escaped his confused brain, yet somehow it seemed as if he had heard all that before.

He made a tremendous effort to collect his mental faculties, but his former power of nervous exaltation had gone, carrying with it his force and his energy. How tired he was! He rested his head on his hands, trying to realize the meaning of what was being said, but he was conscious that a strange torpor was stealing over him, an unconquerable desire to sleep.

He rose, and went out into the corridor to smoke a cigar. The Honorable Carimate, the distinguished gentleman from Lombardy, chairman of an agricultural committee, met him there.

"Ah, Sangiorgio! When am I to have the report from you?"

"The report? Oh, yes! True! When should I have given it to you?"

"Why, a week ago! You are very slow with it. I have been looking for you everywhere. Haven't you received my two letters?"

"No, neither of them," Sangiorgio replied, lying.

"Well, they have attacked us, and I, as chairman, was obliged to reply. Have you been ill?"

"Very ill."

"You look as if you had. Be careful of yourself. Are you not a little feverish still?"

"I think so "

"Be careful! When shall you be ready, then?"

"I do not know; in a week, perhaps. I will let you know "

Sangiorgio returned to the hall, having already forgotten the painful feeling it cost him to lie. The Honorable Bonova, a very tiresome young deputy, was boring the sleepy members with a long speech. The Speaker, from his chair, made a friendly little sign to Sangiorgio, who went up to shake hands with him.

"Ill?" asked the Romagnan of the frank brown eyes.

"A little."

"Why do you not take a short vacation?"

"I intend to do so; I need it "

He returned to his seat, exhausted. A strong feeling of irritation possessed him. Five o'clock struck; the sitting seemed interminable. San Demetrio and Scalia

came to him to ask his opinion regarding a duel between a deputy and an editor; he allowed them to see his indifference to the matter, and barely answered them.

Everyone tired him, bored him; he felt oppressed by the heat, and could hardly breathe.

He left the Chamber hastily, jumped into a carriage and drove to the apartment in the Piazza di Spagna. Once there, he flung himself into the armchair where Angelica had sat, and, leaning his face against the spot that her dear head had pressed, he wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PANGS OF DESPISED LOVE

ANGELICA nearly always broke her appointments with Sangiorgio. Sometimes, in the evening, while handing him a cup of tea, she would whisper:

"To-morrow, at two o'clock!"

"Without fail?"

"Without fail—do not fear."

And, relying on her promise, he lived upon it until the following day. But at two o'clock she had not yet arrived; he told himself she had been delayed, called up all his patience, watched for her at the window.

Then he would be seized with doubt; and finally, as night fell, he would lose all hope and yield to a profound despondency. When he met her again, beautiful, serene, in all her freshness, apparently without a regret, and gracious to everyone, his soul was filled with a painful mingling of tenderness and bitterness.

Never, never would she understand the depth of his love and his sufferings! She would excuse herself with a vague word, thrown carelessly into the midst of a recital of the tiresome routine of the preceding day: there was always a concert, lecture, a charity fair, some visitor, or other useless and tiresome thing, that had detained her. But all the evening she would lavish upon

him the sweetness of her veiled glances, the light of her smile, the grace of her movements, asking him for a book, her fan or her handkerchief, in her melodious voice, enveloping him, as it were, in tenderest caresses, and holding him, fascinated, under her all-powerful charm, until he was again vanquished, and accused himself mentally of ingratitude

But occasionally she remembered the poor solitary lover, who awaited her behind closed doors, while the glorious springtime was flinging its fragrance over the city, the Campagna, and the flowery hills.

She would arrive unexpectedly, in the Piazza di Spagna, at ten o'clock in the morning or at seven in the evening, just as he was about to depart, discouraged. Once she came in the midst of one of those violent storms that come in May, attended by heavy rain, thunder and lightning

These unexpected visits always moved Sangiorgio deeply; he could not accustom himself to this supreme joy; for him, each appearance of Angelica Vargas was a new rapture, a special grace on her part; and her radiant presence cured the terrible bitterness of the long hours of waiting. Sangiorgio, saddened, suffering, ill, would suddenly feel himself restored to life and vigor, like Lazarus arising from the tomb.

In the presence of his loved one, he forgot everything except that he adored her; he knelt at her feet, kissed her hands, and thanked her humbly for not forgetting him, like a Christian that, after the bitterest experiences,

strikes the church pavement with his forehead in rendering thanks for the slightest favor from Heaven.

Angelica remained in the superior sphere where her adorer had placed her, in a solitary niche, sacred, inaccessible, a tabernacle of virtue and purity, whence she deigned to incline her eyes upon him, smiling, with outstretched hands—a merciful divinity, without weakness or indulgence, whom pity had not feminized or rendered humanly weak. All that she did was a royal favor; roses showered from her hands, happiness lay in every fold of her gown. She had only to appear, smile, and disappear, and very well she acquitted herself of this task.

With all this, Sangiorgio's own individuality was rapidly becoming effaced. Never did the divinity trouble herself to ask what he thought, felt, or suffered during her absence; never did she inquire about his work, his desires, his ambitions; she had no curiosity to know the man as he really was. She called him simply Sangiorgio, because his Christian name, Francesco, seemed too common and ordinary; and he himself felt that such was the case, and was conscious of a certain degree of humiliated pride.

Sitting beside him, her eyes resting on a large black velvet cross appliquéd upon the yellow brocaded drapey, she would talk to him by the hour, obeying a natural craving for a sympathetic listener.

She had many things to say to him—she, who was condemned to perpetual silence—regarding her husband's political absorption, his hardness of character, and his

ironical speeches. Yes, she had much to say—she, whose husband's exalted station forbade to her all friendship, love, or intimacy with anyone. Now she had found a confidant, the best of confidants, always happy to listen to her, always approving all that she said and did; always ready to pity or admire her, divining the meaning of her lightest word, her every thought.

He was that rare type of friend for whom all women yearn—the ideal man, whose tender curiosity is insatiable, who understands them, is indulgent toward all their little weaknesses, who magnifies and glorifies their smallest virtues, turning a word into a poem, a simple phrase into an expression of lofty sentiment, a trifling kindness into a deed of heroism—in short, the ideal lover!

And so, sitting beside him in the silence of the flower-scented room, surrounded by rich and luxurious furniture and draperies, fixing her eyes on some glittering spot in the gold embroideries, she would talk to him of herself, of her heart, of the ineffable sadness which he alone could understand, of the trifling joys, the brief pleasures that entered into her life.

The disillusion she had undergone after her marriage had not been sudden, but gradual, steady, leading her, step by step, into indulgence in bitter reverie, until the culmination was complete indifference and a longing for solitude. Her sweet ideals of true conjugal happiness, her pure and peaceful dreams, the trust of a loyal soul, came into contact with the great, burning, selfish passion of Don Silvio—politics! The slow but persistent

drop of water had done its work of destruction in that mind full of dreams and chimerical visions.

The story of her moral widowhood was long, and the recital of her griefs was made in all the varying tones of melancholy.

She made no harsh accusations; no word of violence or of hatred ever passed her lips; but there was always a tone of sad and innocent recrimination, the cry of a wounded heart, uttered with exquisite delicacy but with profound grief.

Sangiorgio listened, without venturing to interrupt her, without daring to tell her how he would have adored her had fate granted him the supreme joy of giving her to him as his wife.

He listened with avidity to the smallest details of her daily trials, sighing over them, feeling all that she felt, saturating his mind with her life, which had become his own, and in which he had sunk all his own individuality. When she turned pale, flushed, or wept in her recital, Sangiorgio's color changed, and his tears flowed in sympathy.

Angelica did not hate her husband, for her gentle heart knew not how to hate; but she did not love him, since he never had loved her. Neither did she respect him, since she had been made aware of the degrading compromises and chicaneries forced upon him by political exigencies. He had simply become indifferent to her, that was all! She said these things in brief, detached sentences, with a terrible, icy simplicity, and Sangiorgio

trembled at the thought that the day might come when she would say the same things about himself.

He hated Silvio Vargas; he hated him uncompromisingly as an enemy and as a wicked man; he hated him so far as to wish him to be defeated, to wish for his dishonor, even his death. Had he not stolen Angelica, had he not withered her young heart and destroyed her illusions? Had he not rendered her distrustful of happiness, made her incapable of loving? Was he not her legitimate possessor? And Sangiorgio abhorred this husband with the anger, the jealousy, and the injustice of a true lover.

His fair visitor talked to him of other things than her own sorrows, of which she spoke with the ingenuousness of a sinless soul, and an innocence that resembled the most refined coquetry. She dilated upon her tastes, her habits, her daily occupations, the little doings of each hour.

She went to bed late every night, she said, but always rose early, as it had been her habit from childhood. No one was permitted to enter her room while she was there, not even the chambermaid. Her sacred retreat, the sanctuary where she slept, dreamed, and thought, must not be profaned by any idle glances. Did not Sangiorgio approve of that?—Certainly, she was quite right, Sangiorgio would reply, with a throbbing heart, and fire in his veins.

She liked to dress herself and to arrange her hair with her own hands, as she had a strong distaste for the servile contact, the vulgar babble, the annoying presence

of a lady's maid. For a long time, while she was a young girl, she had kept her hair cut short and simply parted in the middle, that she might not be obliged to have one of these tiresome women handling her long tresses.

One day Sangiorgio begged her tenderly to let down her hair, that he might see it in all its length and beauty; but she objected, saying that it would take her at least an hour to rearrange it. He supplicated in vain, but she promised to grant his request some other day, when time was not so pressing.

Every morning, when her toilet was finished, she went into her boudoir, where she read, played upon her piano, or attended to her correspondence—always alone. She wrote letters to her friends, or replied to persons who sent her begging letters or asked for recommendations; she wrote very rapidly, on white paper, without seal, crest, or monogram.

Once Sangiorgio asked her for a line of her handwriting, of which he never had seen a single word. Only one line! She consented, but he searched the apartment in vain for a pen, an inkstand, or a scrap of paper. In this temple of love, the implements necessary to work were wholly lacking. Angelica smiled, finding this very amusing.

The charming confidences continued. At half-past eleven o'clock she and her husband usually met at breakfast. In the morning she always felt very hungry, being young and healthy. It would have pleased her to laugh and chat and jest at this agreeable hour, but Vargas was always sallow, irritated, and bored early in the day. He

hardly touched anything, since his appetite was destroyed by the fever of politics. He read the newspapers, his letters and telegrams, just as he did at the Chamber, or at Cabinet meetings.

Ah, how greatly she preferred solitude to the society of this wizened, frowning old man, who let his cutlet grow cold on his plate, who forgot his dessert—always silent, always preoccupied! And, seized with one of the startling caprices of a virtuous woman, she proposed to her astonished adorer that they should go, early some sunny morning, to a little rustic village, where they would find one of those wayside inns covered with vines, and have breakfast there like two schoolchildren on a holiday.

"Why do you torment me thus? Why do you suggest such things to me?" said Sangiorgio, with mournful reproach

"I torment you—I?"

"We never could carry out such an escapade as that"

"Oh, yes, we could!" she declared, smiling with glee at her child-like dream.

Then, after breakfast Angelica Vargas began her public life, her worldly existence; she made the round of the shops, and visited her tailor and dressmaker. She liked gowns of rich simplicity, preferring black costumes, as Sangiorgio had seen her attired when he had observed her for the first time, on the day he arrived in Rome.

Later in the day, there were visits to make and to receive, charity bazaars to attend, benefit concerts, diplomatic receptions, inaugurations, lectures, art exhibitions

—the public business of life, empty and wearisome. Ah, how much happier she would be were she only the wife of a quiet and intellectual man, modest, calm, disdaining power, and the struggle to attain it!

"*Your* wife, Sangiorgio!" she added.

"Angelica!" he cried, in anguish.

She did not understand. Sangiorgio knew her whole life, her soul, her thoughts, but she did not know Sangiorgio.

By-and-by a change came into their secret life.

Angelica became accustomed to these visits, little by little, and after a time she came often, with a matter-of-course air, free and unrestrained, without a shadow of emotion or embarrassment. Her face was serene, her glance clear and frank, her expression innocent

She would enter the apartment in exactly the same way that she entered a friend's drawing-room, speaking in well-modulated tones, with graceful gestures, and pleasant smile. It seemed to her a very simple thing to drop in at Sangiorgio's rooms, after he had left the Chamber, and before it was time for her to call upon the Russian ambassador's wife, or some one else. She would stay a short time, asking his advice, perhaps, about a new frock, or some trinket, a Renaissance inkstand or a vase by Capodimonte. One day, unthinkingly, she said, "I was just passing, and thought you might be in, so I rang."

Another time, while he was peeping out of the window behind the curtains, not daring to raise the window, although the heat was stifling, for fear of being recog-

nized, he saw her walking slowly along in front of the shops, with her rhythmic step. He started, and was tempted to call out to her, to make some signal; but his voice and his courage failed, and she went her way without even turning her head toward the house.

But at the corner of the Via Babuina, she seemed suddenly to recall something, she stopped, and threw a glance at the windows of the first floor. A smile lighted her face when she discerned that pale and eager face behind the pane; she turned her steps toward the house, and came upstairs to chat with him a few minutes.

These meetings with a man who loved her, in that mysterious house, in an apartment to which no one else could penetrate, somehow did not impress her as being wrong or traitorous.

In fact, they became a fixed habit. She shook hands with him within those doors as if she were meeting him in the street; she asked him to button her glove, as if they were at a ball; she bore herself toward him precisely as she would have done in her own drawing-room, surrounded by guests; talked on subjects grave or gay, as it happened; allowed him to read her letters, and, in short, was always familiar, simple, gay and friendly, without ever speaking of love, or thinking of it.

But it was different with Sangiorgio. This intimacy, these confidences, these long talks in that warm, quiet room, filled with flowers, that hand which she allowed him to kiss, that round arm which sometimes leaned gently on his own, those waving tresses which seemed to call for caresses—all these charms and feminine graces

penetrated his whole being, overwhelming nerves and senses

He was only a man, after all, and when that divine face leaned close to his, when he inhaled the fragrance of that dark hair, when that graceful form half reclined in an armchair, shaken by a sob or by a burst of laughter, when that white brow was drawn in thought, he had to struggle with an irresistible desire to clasp her in a tender and passionate embrace.

He tried in vain to drive away this thought and to force his mind to dwell in the pure region of their earlier days; but, in spite of his firm will, he fell more and more under the charm of her witchery. His robust temperament, serious and simple, became possessed with one overmastering desire. It was a daily struggle to hide the truth in his eyes, to dissimulate the trembling of his lips, to prevent his longing arms from pressing her to his breast. He was only a man, after all!

His adored one smiled upon him, came close to his side, whispered in his ear, unconscious, innocent, cruel—and he forced himself to smother his emotion and shut his eyes to temptation. He had promised—yes, he had promised—not to speak of love, but why did she not understand? What sort of woman was she? And how long could he play this cruel, atrocious game? But—he had promised!

This struggle could not last, however. How much longer must he endure this martyrdom? It had grown beyond his strength—to have her there, near him, beautiful, young, adored, in silence and solitude—it was too

much! He would not break his promise, but he would beg her to take away the temptation of her lips, to leave him, never to return.

One morning in June, when telling him about a new style of coiffure that she had adopted, she wished to let down her hair, so that he might see its length.

"No, no!" he murmured.

"Why?" she asked innocently.

"It would be too much for me—I could not endure it."

"Not endure it?"

He said no more. She took off her hat, laughing, pulled out three long hairpins and a shell comb, and shook the dark mass of hair over her shoulders, laughing all the time like a playful child.

"How beautiful it is—how beautiful!" said Sangiorgio in a stifled voice, as he lifted one curl and kissed it.

"May I go into your bedroom to arrange it?" Angelica asked, all pink and blooming under that silky mantle.

She never had shown any curiosity to see that room, but, without waiting for Sangiorgio's word of permission, she entered it immediately, her manner perfectly frank, confident, a little amused.

She stopped short at the sight of the blue velvet curtains bordered with silver, so rich and luxurious in suggestion. She felt a little timid, and passed the shell comb through her hair mechanically, without looking at herself in the Pompadour mirror, her mind filled with strange thoughts.

Suddenly she noticed the blue quilt, with her own initial embroidered in a long Gothic letter. She uttered

*SHE TURNED AND LOOKED DEEP INTO SANGIORGIO'S
EYES, WHEREIN SHE READ THE TRUTH*

From an Original Drawing by Arthur Crisp



a cry of pain and surprise; then she turned and looked deep into Sangiorgio's eyes, wherein she read the truth.

Silently, hurriedly, she fastened up her hair, left the bedroom, put on her hat and gloves, and went away without a word or a glance.

CHAPTER XIX

ROME, THE CONQUEROR

SANGIORGIO stood idly under the great porch of Montecitorio, while the ushers were extinguishing the gas throughout the palace. He gazed at the starry heavens, and still lingered, reluctant to make up his mind to go home.

A tall, thin figure, with bent shoulders, approached him. The man was smoking a cigar; he stopped beside the deputy, and spoke.

"Good evening, Sangiorgio. Are you at liberty?"

"Good evening, Vargas. Yes, I am at liberty, and very much at your service."

"I wish to speak to you."

"Shall we go to your private office, in here?"

"No, not to my office."

"To your house, then?"

"No, not there, either. I prefer to go to your apartment, Sangiorgio," replied the Minister dryly, raising his eyes to meet Sangiorgio's.

"As you will," the deputy replied coolly, understanding instantly that a crisis was coming. "Let us go."

They crossed the Piazza Colonna silently, smoking their cigars and apparently interested only in their long shadows, cast upon the ground in the bright moonlight.

At the corner of the Corso, Sangiorgio was about to turn toward his lodgings.

"That way?" said Silvio Vargas suspiciously.

"Certainly."

"Do you not live at Number Sixty-two, Piazza di Spagna?"

"You are right," was the frigid reply.

Again they relapsed into silence, and continued their way along the Corso, passing people coming out of the summer theaters, who, recognizing the tall form of the Minister, murmured his name to one another as he went by. The Via Condotti and the Piazza di Spagna were deserted.

Sangiorgio had a key to the door of Number 62, although he never went there at night.

When they began the ascent of the dark stairway, he struck a match and preceded Silvio Vargas.

The antique lamp was burning in the anteroom, throwing a subdued, mysterious light on the old marriage-chest and the tall, carved, high-backed chairs.

In the sitting-room, the deputy felt a sudden embarrassment as to how to find a light, since he never had had occasion to use one there. Finally he found a slender candlestick of Pompeian bronze, and lighted its three pink candles.

Silvio Vargas seated himself; he had thrown away his cigar and left his hat in the anteroom. He bent his head, allowed his monocle to fall from his eye, and appeared lost in thought.

"I am waiting, Silvio Vargas," said Sangiorgio, with

great difficulty repressing any hint of impatience in his voice.

"I was thinking, Sangiorgio," said the Minister calmly, "of what a very strong desire you must have to kill me."

"Very strong."

"It must now be almost irresistible."

"Yes—almost irresistible."

"You are wrong, Sangiorgio," Vargas continued, with perfect mildness. "Why do you wish to kill me? I am old—very old; Death will soon accomplish his work."

"Silvio!" cried Sangiorgio, suddenly touched with remorse.

"It is true. I am seventy years old, but I have lived ten lives. I am worn out, finished, exhausted. Some day I shall collapse, as at a single violent blow. You might be my son, Sangiorgio. You would not kill your father in order to gain his wealth, would you?"

"Do not speak to me like that, I beg!"

"Yes, let me go on. We will not fight each other, although I have a right to challenge you, because we should only seem ridiculous—I, so near the tomb, you, so young, yet not having the patience to wait. Yes, we should be ridiculous. I can understand the dramatic element in such cases, when it is a question of youth and love, but I could not endure making myself a subject for laughter. Anything is better than ridicule."

"True—very true!"

"And then—there is Angelica—she must not suffer. To-day, when she threw herself into my arms, trembling with fear, begging me to save her—do not be jealous,

Sangiorgio, she is only a daughter to me!—although I knew her secret, I did not strive to soothe her, for those tears, those sobs, that despair were the revolt of a pure conscience."

"You knew her whole secret?"

"From the very first day. She could not recall the date of her first visit here, but I knew that it was on Sunday, the first day of May. She confessed that she had come here fifteen times, but I knew that she came eighteen times in all—I am the Minister of the Interior! I did not reproach her, any more than I reproach you at this moment. You are right to love each other."

Sangiorgio raised his humbled head, and looked at the sad old husband with inexpressible remorse.

"Naturally," the Minister went on, "as Angelica is young, beautiful, and clever, she needed a congenial young companion, who would know how to appreciate all her attractions, and would make her life happy and gay. Instead, she is tied to a withered, cynical, cold old man, possessed by a single exacting, overwhelming passion—ambition! It is the passion of most men who have passed their fortieth year.

"Angelica preferred you to me; you knew how to love—you, who are not ambitious, you, who are ignorant of this ceaseless fever of the mind, you, whose heart is full of faith and enthusiasm, you, who prize above all things the joys of love. Who could blame you? You are wise; it is I that am the madman, to struggle forever to attain a mere vulgar illusion, while you possess the divine reality. I have no words of reproach for you."

Sangiorgio listened, with his face hidden in his hands.

"Besides," pursued the Minister, as if speaking to himself, "that great thing called Man—that wonderful force, that power—is ruled by a supreme law which says to him: Do one thing and nothing else, if you do not wish to sink into mediocrity and uselessness. Have but a single passion, one sole ideal, from which nothing can turn you. Love, science, politics, art—these highest forms of human passion—are overmastering; each is so vast, so absorbing that the weak human mind cannot embrace them all at once. A man cannot be a lover and a scientist, an artist and a politician, without falling far short of greatness in each path he follows. He must choose: great passions are selfish, and demand great sacrifices."

"What is the wish of Signora Vargas?" Sangiorgio demanded abruptly, rousing himself from the spell of bitter reflection under which he had fallen.

"That you leave Rome!"

"I will go. For how long?"

"For as long a time as possible."

"I will tender my resignation. May I see her once more? I swear to you that I meditate no wrong toward you in making this request."

"She prefers not to see you again."

"Very well! But may I write to her?"

"She begs that you will spare her. Pray try to understand her reserve."

"I understand. Silvio Vargas, tell me, in the name of God, in this, the bitterest hour of my life, is it you that

compel her to all this or she is free to do whatever she chooses?"

"I swear to you that she is free, my son," said the Minister gently. "No one constrains her. You may see her if you wish—I shall make no opposition. But it would be better for you to avoid seeing her," he added, in a hollow voice.

"Does she suffer?"

"She has suffered."

"What does she say of me?"

"She counts upon your love."

"Very well! Say to her that I will go away, and never return. Farewell, Silvio Vargas!"

"Farewell, Sangiorgio!"

And, reaching the great portico, they parted in the silence of the night.

"One word more, Silvio," said Sangiorgio, pausing and turning toward the Minister. "You knew that I loved Angelica, and that she came here. How was it that you feared nothing?"

"Because I know my wife!" Vargas replied significantly, as he turned and went on his way.

Francesco Sangiorgio understood. Like Silvio Vargas, he now knew Angelica—the woman that knew not how to love!

While the House was still in session, Sangiorgio stole unobserved to the Speaker's private suite of rooms, and there wrote a letter tendering his resignation, giving as a reason his failing health—a brief note, with no other details.

After handing it to the usher, he sank upon a large armchair covered with yellow satin; he felt old and weak, as if just recovering from a long illness.

He waited and waited, without daring to return to that Chamber whence he was exiling himself by his own act. He dared not show himself; he feared that his heart would fail him, and that he might fling himself on the floor and weep over the death of all his hopes.

The usher returned with a reply from the Speaker: the Chamber, according to custom, granted him a three-months' leave of absence, at the request of the Honorable Melillo.

Did they not understand, then, that he wished to take a final departure?

He sent another message to the Speaker, to the effect that his malady would prevent his fulfilling the duties of a deputy; then he paced to and fro in the Speaker's sitting-room like a caged lion.

The usher returned once more.

The Chamber accepted his resignation, and the Speaker added a few words of regret, wishing him a speedy return to health. That was all; everything was over.

Mechanically, Sangiorgio felt for his medal—his joy, his pride, his fetich—and it appeared to him smaller, thinner than before. He left the place immediately, resisting the desire to look once more at the halls, the corridors, the buffet, the library, the room of the Lost Footsteps. He departed without giving a single glance to all this, fearing to meet too many deputies, to be pressed for too many explanations, to be obliged to shake too

many hands. He knew that at the first spoken farewell he should burst into tears, like a youth whose father has closed his doors against him.

When he reached the Piazza di Montecitorio, he felt as if all were void and empty within him and around him. He had nothing more to do, he knew not where to go, and he must not seek anyone. He had no desire to eat, to walk, or to talk; everything seemed useless—everything! Instinctively he sought refuge in his old lodgings in the Via Angela Custode, which was now reeking with the unpleasant odors of summer in the city, and gray with dust.

He threw himself on his bed, with his face buried in the pillow, his arms inert, his brain whirling. He had not tried to see Angelica—of what use would it be? Why not submit quietly to the inflexibility of fate?

All was futile, utterly useless. He owed a large sum of money to an upholsterer, another at a bank—but what mattered it? He would pay them later, at some uncertain date, or he might be absolutely ruined. All the worse, but nothing had power to move him now, all was futile, useless.

He had no desire to pay a last visit to the apartment in the Piazza di Spagna, still warm and fragrant with the beloved presence; he did not wish to kiss the chair where she had sat. His thoughts were drowned in contemplation of the past—but the past must be forgotten. He did not even wish to take one last walk in Rome—the beloved city, the city of his dreams, which he was about to leave forever.

No, all was futile, useless! Better to lie there, on that miserable little bed in his furnished lodgings, surrounded by dirt and evil smells, than to go out to see and hear, to feel and to regret, since all was ended forever.

This is surely a somnambulist, this man with fixed and absent gaze, who paces to and fro in the waiting-room at the railway-station, having purchased a second-class ticket for a remote village of the Basilicata, since he had not money enough to travel first-class.

He must indeed be a somnambulist—this man that stumbles as he walks, jostling against other persons, and paying no attention to his luggage, nor to the summer breezes sweeping through the room, nor to anything. Like a somnambulist, he wanders mechanically toward his place in the train, guided by the voice of the guard.

Ah, what a long dream! The shrill whistle of the engine arouses the pale traveler; he springs to the door of his coach and gazes wistfully upon Rome—dark, immense, overwhelming, enthroned upon her seven hills, studded with dazzling lights.

He sinks back upon the seat, like one smitten with death, for, in very truth, Rome has conquered him!

AN
INNOCENT BARABBAS

BY
GRAZIA DELEDDA

TRANSLATED BY JAMES C. BROGAN

GRAZIA DELEDDA

The author of "An Innocent Barabbas" is a native and resident of Sardinia, and has made for herself a high reputation by the production of novels and sketches depicting the peculiarities of life and character in that island—a new field for the romancer. Her first novel, *Anime Oneste* ("Honest Souls") is supposed to be largely autobiographic. *Elias Portolu*, while it has an old plot, derives its strength from its vivid portraiture of a family of typical Sardinians—rough, narrow-minded, but honest in their simplicity. Her *Il Vecchio della Montagna* ("The Old Man of the Mountain") is her most ambitious novel and is considered her masterpiece.

AN INNOCENT BARABBAS

THE poorest man in one of the poorest villages in Sardinia was Chircu Oroveru, better known as Barabbas, because he had once represented that famous Biblical character in a miracle play.

Zio (Uncle) Chircu Barabbas was poor, indeed poorer even than the beggars. His possessions were limited to a single shirt, a single pair of linen drawers, a single pair of breeches, made of the coarse cloth that the Sardinian peasant women weave in such quantities, and a cap, which he had fashioned himself out of the skin of a hare. He had no buttons to his shirt, no waistcoat, no cloak, no socks; and he had no shoes, either—a terrible deprivation in that rocky island.

Yet he was healthy and robust, handsome, too, reminding one of the typical Celt: a figure tall and well-proportioned, reddish hair, and eyes that had always a smile in them. Was it his fault that he had been reared as he had—that he had never learned anything except to cut wood in the forest, bring it into the town, and sell it? It was the sole trade he knew. And, besides, he was so harmless—harmless as a lizard or a seven-year-old child. All his patrimony, in addition to the aforesaid wardrobe, consisted of a silver medal he had worn round his neck since he was a baby, an ax, a horsehair rope he had woven himself, and a pocket-knife.

In spite of all this, he was often in the best of spirits, and on the whole was more at his ease than Signor Saturnino Solitta, the rich capitalist, whose vast new mansion looked as if it had been built of slabs of solid snow. Zio Chircu passed most of his days in the forest, so beautiful at all times and all seasons—beautiful when the evergreens were covered with their pale, golden flowers, or when the azure noontides of summer lay heavy on its languid foliage, or when it was silent, all green and humid, against the pearly background of an autumnal sky, or when its branches bent under the rime crystallized by the winter's cold—and nothing to break the silence but the wood-cutter's ax, and the continuous *tac, tac, tac* of the wood smitten by it, and the *cheep, cheep* of a woodcock near the grass-bordered fountain two hundred yards away. Nothing more Zio Chircu repeated a prayer, or meditated on the wisdom of taking his wood to the houses that paid best, or thought of the time when he should be able to buy a pair of shoes.

He had reached the age of forty-five, when one fine day he was accosted by two men in dark-blue uniforms with yellow buttons on their tunics.

"What are you doing in the forest?" he was asked.

"Can't you see for yourselves?" he answered, stopping, bent almost double under his load, but with his frank eyes raised to meet theirs.

"You own land in the forest then—eh?"

He burst out laughing, then stretched out his neck and looked at one of his naked feet:

"Why, you see that I haven't even a pair of shoes!"

"Then you are acting in contravention of the laws—unless you have been authorized to cut wood."

"No, I have asked nobody's leave. I have my own leave. If I hadn't, I should die of hunger."

"Then you are acting in contravention of"—

"Contra—contra—Say it again."

"Contravention of the laws."

"But what does it mean?"

"It means that you will have to pay a fine or go to prison."

Zio Chircu no longer felt any inclination to laugh; on the contrary, his face became very gloomy.

"Why, I have been cutting wood for thirty years, and no one ever told me that I should stop it, and die of hunger."

The two forest-keepers were apparently moved.

"But what can we do, old fellow! That is as the law goes at present, and it has to be obeyed. We'll let you alone for this time. But take care that we don't catch you at it again."

They did, however, catch him at it again, several times. At last they had to act. He was arrested while carrying his bundle, and was summoned before the magistrate. The guards were not ill-natured, they even pitied him. But what could they do? Their duty was to see that the law was respected.

Zio Chircu had to appear before the justice of the peace for the district, and was mulcted in a heavy fine: for all the witnesses were owners of the forest lands, and

declared that he was one of the most desperate ravagers of the woodland in the whole neighborhood.

The magistrate gave him time to pay the fine. But he knew he had no means of paying it, and that he would have to go to jail. This seemed to him like a horrible dream, and he suffered as he never had suffered in his life. In a few days he grew ten years older; he became dirtier and more ragged than ever, and there was a dull look in his eyes that never had been there before. Ah, no! he did not wish to go to prison, at least as long as the pleasantest season of the year lasted. And he did not wish to go during the bad season, either: it was in winter that he got the best price for his wood, and sold most of it.

Then he made a bargain with another native of the village, and took to the woods; he was accustomed to them, and it did not concern him should he never see the place of his birth again. He cut the wood, and the other man carried it away and sold it. This man robbed him of half what was due him. Zio Chircu knew it, but was forced to keep silence.

He had a deep sense of the misfortune that had crushed him. He was obliged to go farther and farther into the forest, and most of the time he had to do the cutting at night, when the moon was descending on the lonely woods, and when the *tac, tac, tac* of the ax, echoing in the mysterious silence of the moonlight, answered the *tu-whit, tu-whoo* of the owl, which seemed to come now from the somber depths of the forest, and now to be falling from the pale, translucent sky.

Thus passed the autumn, thus the winter; and then came the spring. Zio Chircu was extremely miserable, almost naked, with hair and beard wildly tangled; and sometimes he suffered from hunger, but still he refused to surrender. No, no; he had not surrendered during the keen cold of winter. Should he do so now, when the sun shed a delicious warmth in the thinned copses perfumed with cyclamens and violets? No, no. Time enough to surrender next winter—there was plenty of time!

One day when he was crossing the moor from one wood to another, fortune seemed to have smiled upon him at last. He found a big red portfolio under a bush, two pocket-books and several documents, somewhat injured by the dew.

He examined his windfall: no money; but perhaps the papers had some value; perhaps he would receive a reward when he returned them—he picked up everything and went on his way; and then, when he met the friend who sold his wood for him—that friend knew how to read—he told him everything.

“May the devil fly away with both of us!” cried the friend, staring at Zio Chircu with a suspicious look in his eyes, “if all this did not belong to Signor Saturnino Solitta!”

Zio Chircu shivered with fear and horror. Signor Saturnino Solitta had been robbed and murdered a short time ago, on his way back from Cagliari, where he had sold an immense drove of hogs. Evidently the assassin, after taking the money, had got rid of the portfolio,

pocket-books and papers by flinging them under the bush. "Look, drafts, cheques, papers worth coined money, I tell you!" said the friend, who had once been a servant in the house of a wealthy family. "See, they call this sort of thing a cheque. If you take it to a shop in Nuoro you'll get money for it."

"But I don't wish to. They might think I was the assassin."

"Well, if you don't you are an infernal idiot. It was two or three months ago. Do you fancy that anyone in Nuoro still remembers that old story? You do as I tell you, go in as if you were a servant, buying something or other, take the change they'll give you back, and there you are! You can return here without anyone troubling you."

"But—wouldn't it be like—stealing?"

"Devil take you for a fool! How could it be stealing when there's no owner for it? The stealing was done by the fellow that sent a bullet through the other fellow's neck. Perhaps, after all, it was yourself?"

"You'd crack a joke about anything, you rascal!" cried Zio Chircu, laughing so naturally that the other man's strange suspicions were completely routed.

"Well, then, why not change this cheque? And if there was any unpleasantness, you could say you found it. You can bring me in as a witness, and I'll prove it. But such a blockhead I never met in my life. Don't you see that the rags you wear scarcely cover you?"

"Yes, that is true. But isn't that just the trouble? Won't they have their suspicions when they see me so

ragged? Except for that, it might be done. After all you have said to me, I don't think I ought to feel any scruples."

"I'll lend you my cloak, shoes and stockings."

"You'll have to lend me also your waistcoat and cap."

"You want all my clothes, then?"

"Yes, if you're willing to lend them to me."

"But then—I ought to have something in return"—

"Of course. What should you like? I'll buy you anything you wish for "

"Anything you like to get for me yourself."

For a time Zio Chircu Barabbas felt almost happy, or, at least, not so wretched as usual. He thought of the fine things he was going to purchase—the shoes, the waistcoat, the new ax. And he would also buy things to eat—bread, wine, bacon. Not but that, in the inmost recesses of his soul, he had many doubts, many misgivings. On the whole, however, didn't he find what he had found? And if the worst came to the worst, he was simple enough to believe that he had only to tell the truth, and he would be relieved from further trouble.

And then, his partner—and he met him now oftener than usual in the forest—kept up his spirits and encouraged him; and one day he even said that if Zio Chircu was afraid he would go himself and change the cheque. But Zio Chircu remembered how this man had swindled him in the sale of the wood, and he prudently thought that if anybody had to go and change the cheque, he had better do so himself. So he set out for Nuoro.

After entering the city, he made straight for a shoe

shop. He would first buy a pair of stout shoes of yellow leather with big nails that shone like silver and long shoe-strings of black leather. He tried them on, laced them, unlaced them, then put on the shoes of his friend, which pinched his enormous brown feet painfully. His heart beat when he drew out the dead man's cheque. The shopkeeper took the cheque and examined it; not a muscle of his face stirred; and yet, at that very moment, he was deciding the fate of poor Barabbas.

"I have no change at hand," he said. "But, if you wait a minute, I'll send this to a neighbor, who will change it."

Zio Chircu felt a little uneasy, but he made no objection.

Meanwhile, he thought he would take off his friend's shoes again and put on the new ones, which were more comfortable, although a little too heavy.

"They are as hard as the hide of the devil," he said to himself as he felt them, bending his head almost to the floor; "but when I grease them well, they'll become easy enough. And aren't they fine! I never saw anything so beautiful!"

The clerk whom the shopkeeper had sent to change the cheque did not return, and the shopkeeper, growing anxious and nervous, was going to the door every minute and looking out. At last, the clerk made his appearance; and behind him entered immediately a well-dressed gentleman, with thick red lips; and behind the gentleman entered two policemen. Zio Chircu felt as if his heart stood still; he guessed what was about to happen,

and, for a second or two, he was frightened. But he thought: "I will tell the truth and it will be all right."

"Who gave you this paper?" asked the gentleman with the thick lips.

"I found it," answered the wood-cutter, respectfully. He had risen to his feet, and still held his friend's shoes in his hand.

"Where did you find it?"

He related everything as it had occurred.

"My good man," said the gentleman, in a somewhat mild tone of voice—perhaps he was afraid that this vigorous-looking savage might be dangerous, if driven to extremity—"you will be kind enough to come with us and explain the matter to the Signor Ispettore."

And Zio Chircu followed him willingly, hoping that he had only to tell the truth to be believed. But still he was conscious of a mysterious dread, a secret presentiment of something frightful about to happen.

When they entered the office, the gentleman and the policemen changed their tone. Zio Chircu was interrogated anew, and this time very sternly, by another gentleman, who was pale and bald. Then he was undressed and searched. The objects that had belonged to the dead man were found on him, and he was at once looked upon as the assassin of Saturnino Solitta.

He was thrown into prison and subjected to long and cruel examinations. Every day there were gentlemen coming to torture him with their questions—spectacled graybeards and young men with blond moustaches; and all these made the strangest inquiries of him, and in-

sisted on his telling them when, and how, he had killed Signor Saturnino Solitta.

"But I have killed nobody," he answered. "I found those things you took from me, and I didn't even know what they were. A friend advised me to use the cheque, and, as I was longing for a pair of shoes, I took his advice. If you don't believe me, ask him!"

The friend was sent for and questioned. He acknowledged he had lent the prisoner his clothes—which he asked to have back. He had also lent him his socks; but he swore he knew nothing and had never given Chircu any advice.

"The dirty scoundrel!" thought Zio Chircu to himself. "Ah, I might have suspected it after the way he cheated me in selling the wood!"

And, to be revenged, he said to the judge.

"If he didn't give me advice, neither did he give me his duds."

He reasoned. "Now they won't be given back to him." And then he repented, and recanted what he had said. No, he would never again offend his Lord and Saviour, for he was sure that this misfortune had befallen him as a punishment for laying his hands on what did not belong to him.

During the long hours in his cell he was plagued by a sort of instinctive homesickness for the great lonely woods and the free sky, and he felt unhappy, terribly unhappy. He recalled the period when he hid in the thickets, and all the sufferings he had endured, and it seemed to him now that he had sinned grievously by complain-

ing of them. His life then was full of happiness compared with what it was now. And yet he did not form any correct idea of the tribulation that was on the watch for him. He was always hopeful of being set at liberty some time or other, and that soon; and every night, during the drowsiness that preceded sleep, he believed he heard the *tac, tac, tac* of the ax resounding through the silence of the forest, accompanied by the owl's slow and melancholy cry.

A long time passed in this fashion. Nobody apparently had a thought for Zio Barabbas; nobody came to see him, or sent him a cigar or a measure of wine or a loaf or a clean shirt; while the most wretched among the other prisoners were sure to receive something some time or other. And even the old gentleman with the shining spectacles, which gave one a shiver even to look at, and the young men with the blond moustaches, and the others with the bald heads and pale faces, had all seemingly forgotten poor Chircu.

But one day he received a sheet of paper, partly printed and partly written; his heart was trembling while it was being read to him. It was the decree that sent him to stand his trial before the Court of Assizes. Next, he had a visit from his counsel, a bilious young man, not very keenly interested in his client. He, too, wanted to force Zio Chircu to relate how and when he had assassinated Signor Saturnino Solitta.

"Tell me the truth," he repeated. "You must tell the whole truth to your lawyer. Then we may be able to arrange things."

At certain moments Zio Chircu was tempted to declare that he had killed Solitta, for it seemed to him at times that he would have a better chance of extricating himself by confessing a crime he had had nothing to do with than by asserting the truth. But when the greenish, bilious face of his lawyer was no longer before him he began again to hope for the triumph of truth and justice. Moreover, his prison-mates assured him that juries were made up of honest people who had human hearts, and not hearts of stone like the magistrates.

And then came the morning of his trial. Zio Chircu awoke almost gay; he had dreamed that he was in the forest, cutting wood near a river, and a marsh-bird, quite black, except for its claws, which were long and as green as the rushes, was hopping among the branches of a willow and singing the strangest song!

The friend who used to sell his wood for him was one of the witnesses; he deposed that the prisoner had always been a cunning, savage, unsociable fellow.

The counsel for the prosecution depicted the prisoner as "a wild beast of the forest who had long and carefully planned his crime in advance, and had watched for the passing of his victim; then, like some ferocious animal crouching in the jungle, he had leaped from his lair on his prey." We give the words *verbatim*, for this is a true story.

Zio Barabbas, who was fairly paralyzed with terror, could not for some time take his eyes from this spectacled gentleman to whom he had never done any harm. To give himself a little courage, he made an effort, and

at length succeeded in fixing them on the jury, which consisted of smug, peaceful-looking tradesmen with comfortably protuberant stomachs; some of them had an air of jollity that was encouraging; the sight of them gave him a little hope.

Then his counsel began his address in behalf of the prisoner. He was greener and more bilious looking than ever, and a habit he had of grinding his teeth during the more oratorical parts of his speech produced a very unpleasant effect.

To bring the matter to a conclusion, the poor man was condemned to hard labor for life. He wept bitter tears. He looked once more appealingly at the members of the jury, these men that were so fat and peaceful and comfortable; he recalled his dream, his blind confidence in the triumph of truth, and he told himself that everything that appears to be good is a lie.

His lawyer thought to cheer him a little by drawing up an appeal to the Supreme Court and getting him to sign it, or rather to make his mark. But Zio Chircu no longer had any confidence, no longer believed in justice, no longer had any hope. His heart shriveled up, became as dry and bitter as a wild plum. He stopped praying, stopped weeping.

And now he was carried far away, and taken to the salt-pits; his hair and beard and moustache were shaved; he was dressed in red, and a chain was riveted to his ankles. For a long time he was in a state of despair. The sight of an immense sea sharpened the intense homesickness of the wretched man, accustomed as he

was to dwell in places that were covered and had no horizon.

But in the course of years he grew accustomed, and even resigned, to his new life. Sometimes, when he thought his old age would have been passed in the darkest wretchedness, he experienced a sort of satisfaction in dwelling on the fact that now he need no longer be anxious about his future.

He had become vicious also: he had lost the innocence that he had preserved up to the very day of his condemnation. He no longer thought of God, or if he did think of Him, it was with anger, as of a monstrous being who had permitted the most infamous injustice to be wreaked on one of His creatures.

Zio Barabbas formed a sort of friendship with one of his companions in misfortune, a Sardinian also, a little old man who hardly reached to his elbow, with a red, chubby face and two keen, little, blue eyes, sunk far back under his bulging forehead. This old man came from the village next to that in which Zio Chircu was born, and his name was Zio Pretu.

He was a jovial little manikin, was utterly without scruples, and a great braggart; but, after succeeding in persuading his fellow convicts that he had performed the most marvelous feats, he would burst out laughing, and acknowledge that his stories were all fibs, and he was only humbugging them. So when Zio Chircu was brought to the convict prison, there was no one there who gave any credit to the narratives of Zio Pretu. Yet, when Zio Pretu did tell the truth, he spoke so convinc-

ingly, that it was hard not to believe him; but he did not tell the truth often, or to many persons.

When Zio Pretu had won the entire confidence of Zio Chircu he related his history in a few words, and with a persuasive accent that carried conviction with it.

"Listen. I am from the village, you know. I was living very comfortably with cows and hives and fields of corn and beans. But I wished to be still better off than I was. I knew a priest that was rich, so rich even that he possessed gold plate, and I and some of my comrades set out to rob him. As he made an outcry, we had to choke him, and he fell dead. And just when we had everything nicely fixed, the carbineers appeared. *Pop! whiz!* shots here, and shots there. We managed to escape, though, and with the booty, too, all except one, who unluckily remained in the hands of the soldiers; and he revealed our names, the coward! I was then forced to take to the woods; I managed to sell all that belonged to me, however, so that the authorities didn't get hold of it; I put the money into a pitcher, and buried the pitcher. I was just in time; a little later, I was arrested."

"And the booty?" asked Zio Chircu. "What did you do with it?"

"Oh, I bought food with it when I was in hiding. But, to be frank with you, every mouthful I ate had a bitter taste. And what might your story be?"

"Oh, mine is somewhat like yours," the other returned, bitterly. "I also am here for robbing and murdering a

man. Still, there is a difference. I have been accused of these crimes, but I never committed them."

"Ah, that is unjust. I assassinated my man beyond a doubt, and I don't wish to gainsay it. And I have sincerely repented it, I can tell you, for it was the cause of my losing everything I owned."

"You have no family?" inquired Zio Chircu, tentatively, thinking of the pitcher.

"To hell with my family! My relatives abandoned me like a dog; and they may die like dogs themselves, for all I care."

Then Zio Chircu and Zio Pretu formed a friendship that lasted for many years and afforded some little consolation to these two unfortunates. They both wore the fetters of ignominy, they were fellow-countrymen, spoke often of the far-away land they came from, and what served to bind them closer, was that both were sure they would both die in the horrible spot—would die, not as men, but as mere numbers, lost in the blank desolation of these salt-pits lashed by the sea and by the sun.

The character of Zio Chircu had completely changed. He had become surly and quarrelsome. At certain moments, when he was in one of his darkest moods, he would insult his old comrade and come very near striking him. Then the little old man would laugh and say:

"Number Three-fifty-one, don't act the bully, or I won't tell you where I have hidden my pitcher."

"May the devil roast you! Who in hell cares for yourself or your pitcher? Even if you told me, what good would it do me?"

"You'd at least have the satisfaction of knowing what I know."

"Go to blazes! I wish the devil would plug you into one of the salting-tubs! You'd better not provoke me further, Number Two-thirty-six."

When they called each other by their numbers, instead of by their names, it was the deadliest insult they could exchange.

One day when Zio Chircu was in good humor he said to Zio Pretu:

"Why don't you write to someone? He would dig up the pitcher and send you some money. You would be able to live better, buy this and buy that for yourself."

"Not such a softy! He would keep the whole of it. I know the world better than you do."

"But, then"—

"But, then? I guess what you mean. Well, when I am at my last hour I will reveal the hiding-place to a beggar—he must be a beggar, for then there'll be a chance that he'll pray for my soul."

And weeks and months and years slipped by; the hair of Zio Chircu turned gray, his chest became hollow, and even his stature seemed to diminish. As for Zio Pretu, he was almost decrepit, but he did not look older than his comrade, and he kept on relating his mendacious stories and then laughing at them. If he continued to pour out these extravagant fibs with a fluency that never failed him, he did so to amuse himself rather than to amuse others.

On a certain day an extraordinary incident occurred.

Zio Chircu was summoned to the office of the director of the penitentiary. He was a little excited on his way, because nothing like this had ever happened to him before. The director said to him:

"Now that so many years have elapsed; now that you are an old man, you should at last confess the truth. Did you commit this crime—yes or no? Tell the truth, the whole truth. You will find it to your advantage. We will solicit your pardon, and you may be fortunate to be allowed to spend your last days in your country."

Zio Chircu again uttered a fierce and energetic denial.

"No! though I should live as many years as there are grains of sand on the seashore, and spend the very last of them here, No! I have assassinated nobody. No, no, no!"

He was then dismissed. He at once returned to Zio Pretu, who was awaiting his coming with some anxiety, and gave an angry account of his interview with the director.

"It's a wrong, a damnable wrong!" said the old man. "I assassinated the priest beyond a doubt, and I don't wish to gainsay it. If I am summoned I will confess everything, and if they choose to pardon me, why, they will pardon me. But to torture a poor devil like you—ah, that isn't just!"

The next day Zio Chircu was again summoned to the director's office and questioned for the second time. The blood surged to his head, and he was almost on the point of flinging himself on the director.

"Well, since it is so," said the director, changing his

tone, "I may as well tell you the real murderer has been discovered—although I should not say 'discovered.' The truth is that he was overwhelmed with remorse and confessed his crime; but it comes to the same in the end. You have every reason to rejoice, then. You will make your preparations for leaving, for you will soon be free."

When he met Zio Pretu he broke into such a wild fit of weeping that the old man was astonished; these were the first tears he had ever seen him shed.

"What is the matter?"

"The real murderer has been discovered," answered Zio Chircu, sobbing and repeating the words of the director; "although he was not discovered exactly, he was overwhelmed with remorse and confessed his crime; but it comes to the same in the end. I am to make my preparations for leaving"

Then Zio Pretu began crying also, and they wept together tears of mingled joy and sorrow.

"But what will become of me?" asked Zio Pretu.

"And what about me? What can I do?" asked Zio Chircu. "Liberty is fine, and it's a good thing to have a good character, and I have got back mine. But I am old, I can no longer work, I can no longer earn my living; and I have no one belonging to me."

"Your neighbors will come to your help."

"But I should hate to live on alms."

And with a sad smile, in which there was a little irony: "Why," he retorted, "why shouldn't you tell me where you have hid the pitcher?"

Zio Pretu's countenance suddenly brightened.

"And why not, really? You are not a beggar, but you are a poor man. Well, then, I'll tell you. And, in fact, I have been long thinking about it. But you will remember me in your prayers?"

"Ah, my prayers! my prayers! I don't remember a single one of them!" exclaimed Zio Chircu, aghast. "I have forgotten God, and yet God has not forgotten me. He wished to try my faith, and I have lived like a heathen!"

During his last day in the penitentiary Zio Pretu told his comrade where he had hidden the pitcher. The separation was a great sorrow for Zio Pretu; but the old man found some comfort in thinking that, before dying, he had been able to do a service to a poor man on whom God had laid a very heavy hand. As for Zio Chircu, he went away feeling quite happy, for he had recovered his character, and his future was assured.

When he returned home he found the villagers at first very generous, and he was able to live for a time on the alms they lavished on him. He was always thinking of the convict's pitcher, but he could not as yet go in search of it, for he felt very feeble and incapable of making a long journey. Before he could hope to reach the spot indicated it was absolutely necessary for him to recover his strength.

Gradually his neighbors became accustomed to the sight of him, and the alms grew less abundant. After a time he was entirely neglected, and nobody paid any attention to him.

Then he saw it was time to make a quest for the con-

vict's treasure. His heart beat fast as he recognized on his journey the places where he had lived before his misfortune. Many of the woods were thinned, and some of them cleaned away entirely; but among the alders on the bank of the stream still vibrated the *cheep, cheep* of the marsh-birds; the slow, even note of the cuckoo still rang out from the mastic bushes; and those voices brought back to Barabbas endless memories of far-away ancient things.

A strange melancholy oppressed him. He had a terrible mental picture of his wickedness. Ah, how vile he had become since that distant day of his affliction, and how sinful had been his despair of God's mercy! Then he thought of his old comrade in the convict prison, and he asked himself whether Zio Pretu was not better than himself, this man who had committed a crime and was expiating it with resignation and by doing good to others. Ah, no, no, no, no, no! he would not find the pitcher! He did not deserve such luck, for he had sinned too deeply, had blasphemed and despaired. Then he repented of despairing still, prayed, and went on with more courage.

Toward evening, he reached the place described by the convict. It was a copse of poplars, utterly lonely and far from any human habitation. Night was falling, crystalline and unclouded, scintillant with its pure stars; the poplars rose to the heavens on their slender glossy trunks, like enormous silver flowers; the earth, softly carpeted with leaves, exhaled a humid, indefinite odor.

Zio Barabbas had brought with him the iron of a small

mattock; he drew it from under his blouse, and then groped along the ground in the darkness in search of something that might serve as a handle. At length, he found a branch which he was able to fit to the iron of the mattock. Then he waited for the rising of the moon.

His heart beat as if it would burst through his breast; the whole remainder of his life was at stake now; he would be compelled to spend it in the most abject misery, if God's help failed him. He sat down on the grass and hid his face in his hands.

Ah, how deeply he had sinned, how deeply he had sinned! But he repented bitterly. Surely God would be good to him! And at the same time he felt that, even if he did not find the pitcher, he should not complain.

The moon rose; the damp leaves of the poplars gleamed like silver, the odor of the ground became more distinct.

Zio Barabbas knelt down and began digging. In the profound silence of the solitude around him, he grew afraid of the sound—the only sound to be heard—he was making himself.

At last the mattock struck a hard substance and gave forth a metallic sound. Zio Barabbas plunged into the hole, and felt the handle of the pitcher, then he continued his work with furious ardor, and the pitcher was soon unearthed. He seized it, shook it. The coins inside rattled and jingled.

He made the sign of the cross, and, with his face turned up to the sky, thanked the Divine mercy.

He resembled an old savage in an attitude of adoration before the moon.

